

WATER FROM THE DESERT

Missionary Stories from the
Life of the Monks of our
Ancient Church

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“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and
of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And behold, I
am with you always, to the end of the age.”
(Matt. 28:19-20)

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1. SAINT ANTHONY THE GREAT

Introduction

He was born in 251 or 252 in Komah (Qiman al-Arus) of southern Memphis. He lost his wealthy parents when he was 20 years old. From then on, he took care of his sister. One day, when he heard in the Church being read: *"If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me,"* he was seized by divine zeal. He distributed his property, except for a small part for his sister, and began to practice asceticism.

First, it was outside his house, then near his village, and later, on a mountain on the right bank of the Nile. He became famous and gathered many disciples.

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During Maximian's persecution, he went to Alexandria to encourage the faithful. He returned to the desert, where the crowds visited him. He came down again to Alexandria at the urging of St. Athanasius to support him in his fight against the Arians.

Upon returning to the desert, he did not live long. At the age of 105, he exchanged this life for the true and eternal one. We celebrate his memory on January 17.

When Antony was in the desert, he learned that the Arians claimed he agreed with them, and he was very disturbed and indignant. Therefore, as soon as the pastors of the Church requested it, he hurried down to Alexandria to refute the slanderers. He publicly renounced the heresy, declaring that he considered it so far removed from the faith of Christ that beyond it lies only the Antichrist. He simultaneously taught true doctrines that the Son of God is not a created being, nor did He come from mortal nature, but is the unchanging Word and the eternal wisdom of the Father. It is heresy to say that there was a time when He did not exist, for the

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Word existed eternally, inseparable from the Father.

He also told them not to consider the most impious followers of Arius as members of the Church because no relationship could stand between light and darkness, between the faithful and those who differ not at all from idolaters. For, since they consider the Son to be a creation, they thus worship the creation and not the God who created it, provoking the outrage of the entire world, as they regard the Creator and Governor as one with the created beings.

The flock of the Church rejoiced to hear such an important man condemning heresy and defeating the wicked wolves by his prestige. All the city's inhabitants rushed to see Anthony and receive his blessing. Indeed, even some pagan priests came, eagerly requesting to meet the man of God, as they called him, for the reputation of his previous miracles had shaken them, and they wanted, above all, to approach him and touch his robe, believing it would do them good.

In those few days that Anthony stayed in Alexandria, so many people became

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Christians that, under other circumstances, would not have been converted in even a year. Such was his radiance and his ability to persuade. Later, because some, thinking that he was bothered by the presence of so many people, prevented people from approaching him, he calmly said jokingly: *"These are no more than the demons that tempt us in the desert!"*

The Saint's great wisdom made the pagan sages not dare to argue with him. Although he never went to school, he always forced them to retreat in shame in discussions.

Once, two men had approached him, intending to mock him. When he saw them, he understood their intentions and warned them that it was pointless for philosophers to engage with a fool like him. And when they replied that they did not think him a fool but that he was very wise, he said to them:

"If you came to a madman, you have wasted your effort, but if you think I am wise, why do you not follow my example? Surely you agree that we should imitate the good. If I were to visit you, I would do so with the intention of resembling you, so

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since you have come to me, do as I do, become Christians."

The idolaters, embarrassed yet filled with admiration, turned and left. At another time, some naive individuals who met him thought they found the opportunity to mock him for not having learned letters. So he told them,

— "*Tell me your opinion, which comes first, the nous or letters? Is the nous dependent on letters, or are the letters dependent on it?*"

They replied, of course, that "*the nous comes first.*"

— "*Well then,*" Anthony retorted, "*whoever has a sound nous does not need letters.*"

The dialogue surprised everyone because it was unusual for an illiterate person to show such wisdom. Everyone admired the ascetic because, although he was raised and aged in the desert, he was cheerful and likeable. He did not provoke antipathy in anyone; he only provoked pleasure because he was sweet-spoken.

At another time, some Neoplatonists came to see him and asked him to explain the faith of Christ, for, as they said, they found it amusing every time they decided to study the preaching of the cross.

Anthony looked at them sternly, but at the same time felt pity for their glaring ignorance, and said to them:

—“What do you think is preferable, to confess the cross of Christ or to accuse him of corrupting married women and children like your gods? The ascent on the cross demonstrates courage and disdain for death, while the other reveals enslavement to lascivious desires.”

“Then, what is more reasonable, to say that the Son of God, without altering his divine nature, took on a mortal body out of infinite love so that by participating in human nature, he might make men partake in the divine and spiritual; or to equate divinity with irrational animals, worshipping quadrupeds and reptiles and likenesses of mortal men?”

“And how do you dare to mock us because we say that Christ appeared on earth as a man, while you claim that the

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soul departs from heaven and, after wandering aimlessly here and there, suddenly falls from the firmament and enters the first body it encounters, regardless of whether it is the body of a human, a quadruped, or a reptile?"

"Our faith presents the salvation of mankind as the purpose of Christ's presence in the world. You are adrift in deception, under the impression that you are investigating the case of the uncreated soul. We find that through His benevolent Providence, the Almighty God could indeed achieve this paradox, namely, to become incarnate."

"You insult and offend the Creator of the nous, considering the soul, the image of the nous, as a vagabond that roams and dwells within beasts and corpses, moving from body to body. And if the soul is thus changeable, then the nous will not be immutable since what is the image, such is the original."

"You despise the cross, but what do you think is more wonderful and significant, to endure the mockery of the wicked and not to falter even in the face of the danger of death, or to follow the fables of the false

miracles of Osiris and Isis and the machinations of Typhon and the running around of Cronus and the eating of his children and the murders of fathers?"

"Of course, the cross, the fear and terror of demons, the destroyer of death, is for you foolishness, while wisdom is these childish things. But how do you mock the Crucified and at the same time not admire His Resurrection?

"Those who spoke about the cross also wrote about the Resurrection. Or why do you argue using only the subject of the cross and overlook the multitude of miracles that Christ performed, the resurrections of the dead, the granting of sight to the blind, the healings of the paralysed, the cleansing of so many lepers, walking on the waves of the sea, and all the other amazing signs He left in His passing through the earth?

"Do all these not prove that He is not an ordinary man, but God Himself? You wrong yourselves when you do not examine the Gospel with a genuine and unbiased spirit. If you were to take the trouble to study it sincerely, you would be left without any

doubt that Christ is God, who came into the world to grant salvation to humanity.

“Usually, you do not clearly explain what you believe. And indeed, what can one say about beasts except to describe their irrationality and savagery? You claim that all these naïve religious stories of yours are allegorical myths, that the rape of Persephone implies the worship of the earth, the lame Hephaestus the worship of fire, Hera the air, Apollo the sun, Artemis the moon, Poseidon the sea, and so on.”

“Your mistake lies in the fact that, once again, you do not worship the God who created all these things but only the creations themselves. Undoubtedly, creation deserves admiration, but you were supposed to remain in admiration and not deify and worship it. In this way, the honour that belongs to the Creator is given to the creations, and it is as if you honour a beautiful house, setting aside the architect who built it, or as if you praise a well-trained army, ignoring the general who organised it. What do you have to say about this? Is it not worth our mockery more than you mock the crucifixion of our Lord?”

And since the pagan sages, filled with embarrassment, could not find what to say, Antony continued: "Since you are more convinced by demonstrative arguments and professionally practice the art of sophistry, you require our piety to be based on logical proofs. But tell me, how do you think truth verification can be made, particularly concerning God, with logical reasoning or initial assumption? And what comes first, faith or proof?"

The sophists replied in unison that "the exact knowledge of truth begins with the initial acceptance."

Then Antony said: "You answered correctly; faith has its source in the soul's experiences, while logical proof is merely a technical method. It is, therefore, natural that those who believe find verification through reasoning about the object of their faith unnecessary. That is why we cannot communicate. What for us is an indescribable experience; you want us to fit into the moulds of reason and invent the appropriate words to express what we live experientially. Many times, this is impossible, and you cannot understand. But is it not more beneficial to transform

our faith into life rather than to construct logical proofs?"

"So, we Christians did not come to accept the mystery of our faith through the paths of reason but led by the grace of God, which is granted to believers through Jesus Christ. Look at my own illiteracy. Even though I have never gone to a teacher to learn logic, I believe in God, recognising His existence through His creations and His paternal providence for them."

Moreover, our faith is alive; it is based on the life and teaching of the historical figure of Christ, while your wisdom is merely the result of sophistical combinations.

But there is also something else. Do you not see that your fantasies and idle talk [φληναφήματα = chatter, foolish, meaningless words] are receding among the people day by day while, at the same time, the faith in Christ is spreading everywhere? And that you, despite all your efforts to construct logical arguments, are unable to convince any Christian to become a pagan, while on the contrary, we, the unlettered, teaching the faith of

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Christ, are daily diminishing the last followers of your superstitions, continuously winning over those who acquire the knowledge of Christian truth and believe in the divinity of Jesus.

You fail to prevent the spread of the faith of Christ, although you know how to use words with remarkable skill. With our meagre resources, we proclaim a Crucified One and vanquish the demons you respect as gods. Wherever the sign of the cross is formed, no dark demonic force can withstand its power, and your miracle workers become powerless.

Tell me the truth, what has happened to your oracles? Where have the festivals of the Egyptians and the false prophecies of the magicians gone? All have weakened and disappeared as soon as the cross of Christ was erected. So, who deserves mockery, the cross that abolished them or those that were abolished?

And that is precisely what is remarkable: while your own worships have never been persecuted, on the contrary, they always enjoy the respect of your fellow citizens, whereas the faithful of Christ are hunted down, our faith

flourishes and increases, and yours decays and disappears. Although surrounded by honours from rulers and the powerful, your gods are withering. Although mocked by the wise and persecuted by authority, Christ and his teaching conquer the world.

When have people ever come so close to the knowledge of God? When have such brilliant examples of temperance and virtue emerged? When has there been so much disdain for death? All these are the consequences of Jesus' sacrificial death. How can one doubt when seeing the martyrs indifferent before death and sacrificing their lives for their faith or seeing the deaconesses of the Church keeping their bodies pure and immaculate, remaining unaffected by pleasures as brides of Christ?

What I have presented is sufficient to convince you that the Christian faith is the only true way for man to know God. However, you demand that I present logical arguments; otherwise, you remain unyielding. As our Lord taught us, we do not rely on philosophical proofs. We prefer to rely on the power of faith.

Here! Some possessed individuals have come here, seeking their healing. I asked a moment ago, and they are now bringing these unfortunate people near us. Try to heal them with whatever means your religion allows, with arguments or some trick or rational method, invoking your idols. Do not be afraid; try the power of your gods! Are you not confident that they can intervene and save these poor souls? Well, since you admit their weakness, now see the invincible power of the cross of Christ."

In saying this, he made the sign of the life-giving cross over the sick three times and called upon the Lord. Immediately, the people rose up, freed from the demons that tormented them, thanking and praising the Almighty God who had healed them. The philosophers were so astonished that they could hardly believe it, not only because of the miracle, which was indeed astonishing but also because of the method that the wise Anthony followed to convince them.

The saint saw them startled and silent and said with a smile: "Why are you amazed at this event? It is not I who did it, but Christ, who is always ready to act for the sake of those who believe in Him.

Come, and you will see that our faith is not words, reasoning, proofs, but practical love. If you believe and accept Christ as your Saviour, you will no longer need logical proofs; it will be enough for you to have a trusting surrender to Him."

These were Anthony's words and actions. The philosophers, speechless and amazed, greeted him with deep respect and left with the decision to follow the elder's path soon.

Μεγάλου Αθανασίου, *Βίος και Πολιτεία οσίου Αντωνίου* 69 έξ. 72 έξ. Βιβλιοθήκη Ελλήνων Πατέρων και Εκκλησιαστικών συγγραφέων (ΒΕΠΕΣ). Έκδ. Αποστολικής Διακονίας τόμ. 33, σελ. 45 έξ. και 46 έξ.

2. VENERABLE CHARITON THE CONFESSOR

Introduction

He came from Iconium in Lycaonia. When the Roman emperor, Aurelian (270-275), persecuted Christianity, Chariton heroically confessed his faith. He would undoubtedly have borne witness for Christ if Aurelian had not died in the meantime.

After Aurelian's death, peace prevailed. Chariton was freed and went to Jerusalem. On the way to the holy city, he fell into an ambush by robbers, who trapped him in a deserted cave. When he was miraculously freed from them, he dedicated himself to asceticism. He founded many monasteries and acted as a missionary. Around 350, he departed in deep old age to the heavenly

abodes. We celebrate his memory on September 28.

Once, when Chariton was travelling on a deserted road, he fell into an ambush by robbers who, after tying him up and beating him, abandoned him in their cave. The holy man first thanked the Lord for the sufferings that had befallen him and then, addressing the wicked demon, said:

— “Did you think you would frighten me by threatening me with death, or did you want to prevent me from fulfilling the mission I have undertaken? But know that the power of God that accompanies and guards me makes me despise death. Learn also that you will never be able to make me change my purpose and abandon the desire to live the life of Christ, for that is precisely the aim of the Lord, who rejoices when He sees the repentance of people and grants His presence to those who strive in the fight for virtues.”

Meanwhile, the thieves returned to their hideout, where a cruel death from the poison of a viper awaited them. Thus, they received just recompense for their crimes

against innocent people. In the place where the thieves died, Chariton later built a church and founded a monastery. And here is how.

Marvellously and incomprehensibly, the bonds were loosed from him. After he buried the thieves, he took the money they had stolen, considering that he had been entrusted with its management. Some of it he gave to the poor, and others he distributed to deep-rooted hermits. With the remaining money, he built the monastery, whose dedication of the main church was performed by the Archbishop of Jerusalem, Makarios.

Chariton decided to engage in asceticism in this monastery, and especially in the cave inside. However, he was more renowned, and his reputation attracted crowds of Jews and pagans to the monastery, whom the saint instructed and baptised, guiding some of them into the angelic life.

And it was not only his miracles that brought the people's esteem but also his living example. Indeed, the greatest miracle was to see this man striving so zealously to approach God, considering

restraint a pleasure and poverty a wealth. To see him seeking insomnia and resting lying on the ground, preferring this way of life with the rough garments he wore to the luxury and indulgence of satisfying the flesh, like those who are satisfied dressing in soft robes.

All this seemed effortless to him because he looked forward to the eternal enjoyment of the goods of the heavenly kingdom. He was merciful, sensitive to the pain of his fellow human beings, hospitable, gentle, and serene. He never turned anyone away from him and willingly gave advice when asked. Those who approached him felt overwhelmed by his divine breath.

Therefore, it was natural for people to arrive like ever-flowing rivers at the cell of Chariton. However, he desired solitude and saw that this continuous contact with the world that adored him was dangerous. That is why one day, he gathered his close disciples and, after talking to them about the practices of asceticism they should follow, left one of the brothers distinguished for his holiness in his place and abandoned the monastery.

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He walked for a day and found a deserted cave near the areas of Jericho, where he decided to stay. For quite some time, alone with God, he lived ascetically in the wilderness until the Christians learned once again of his dwelling place and began to arrive to enjoy the benefits the Lord bestowed through his servant's hands. Many who benefited decided to become monks and set up their huts around the cave of Chariton. Soon, a new monastery was established, and the saint once again longed for solitude. Therefore, just as before, he set the rule for the brotherhood and indicated his successor, then departed for the desert.

He walked a long way and, at one point, decided to settle at a short distance from a large estate. What was the world's Saviour achieving with these endless movements of Chariton? Why, indeed, to reveal himself to people like a bright lighthouse, and on the other hand, to lead those who knew and associated with him to salvation. And among them were not a few pagans.

So, even in the new dwelling, the crowds began to arrive, and before long, a large brotherhood had formed again. For them, the saint established a new monastery and

remained to guide the monastic community for quite some time.

Later, after once again, the love of tranquillity flooded his heart, he learned that on a nearby mountain, atop some steep and inaccessible cliffs, there was a cave that the local shepherds called “overhang” because one could only reach it by a rope ladder. In this cave, the brave athlete of virtue went and settled.

And as the years passed, and his body, from old age and the labours of asceticism, began to obey the needs of survival no longer and could not serve itself, what do you think the holy elder did? He entrusted the care of his life to the Lord, with absolute trust in His omnipotence and philanthropy.

And behold the miracle. What the ascetic needed most was water. Thus, a spring gushed forth inside the cave, providing crystal-clear water to quench the elder’s thirst until God took him close to Him. And what more could one want to understand how close to deification, Chariton had come?

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Συμεών του Μεταφραστή, *Μην
Σεπτέμβριος*, Βίος Οσίου Χαρίτωνος Θ-
IB/Migne PG τόμ. 115, στηλ. 900-913.

3. HOLY MARTYR ABBA APOLLONIOS

Introduction

The exact time when Apollonios lived is not known. However, since he was martyred for the faith of our Lord, his earthly life must be placed towards the end of the third century or the beginning of the fourth century. We do not know details about his life except for his martyrdom, an incident of which we present below.

1. Among the hermits of Thebaid was Apollonios. He had been granted the privilege of being a deacon, and many times, the opportunity arose for the gifts of the Spirit that adorned him to become evident, for he himself struggled and

attained virtues to a degree greater than anyone else.

2. During a period of great persecution against Christians, Apollonios tried to support many in their faith so that some, filled with courage, even reached martyrdom. His actions led to his arrest and imprisonment. There, with much patience, he endured the insults and humiliations from the pagans without breaking. On the contrary, he found opportunities to sow the word of faith.

3. One of those who tortured the monk was Philemon, the musician, a man famous for his cruelty and the wretchedness of his life. He would vulgarise and insult Apollonios, saying *he deserved to be hated by all people*. He even shouted that he should be executed as soon as possible.

The deacon, with characteristic gentleness, replied one day:

- *"May God have mercy on you, my man, and not hold against you the sins of what you utter against me."*

4. Philemon, who considered an outburst of anger from the prisoner to be

natural and certainly not this kind-hearted reaction, deeply regretted his actions upon hearing the words of the hermit, and, as if struck by an arrow from a divine quiver, he immediately ran to the court, which was publicly judging the Christians, and thundered:

- *"You are behaving unjustly, judge, condemning these innocent people who truly believe in God. The Christians do nothing wrong, nor can one find hatred in their words; rather, even towards their enemies, they act with sympathy, and only good wishes come out of their mouths."*

5. At first, the judge thought that Philemon was mocking him, but when he saw him continue, he feared that he had gone mad and ordered him to be taken away.

However, Philemon shouted:

- *"I am not crazy, judge of injustice. I have become a Christian."*

6. Astonished, the judge tried to placate him with promises and flattery but soon realised that his efforts were in vain and ordered him to be beaten mercilessly.

Immediately, he brought Apollonios to the scene, who accused him of misleading Philemon and handed him over to the torturers. The hermit calmly listened to the accusation, and while they were beating him, he said:

- *"I will pray for you, judge, and all present to follow Philemon into this delusion."*

7. The judge, filled with malice, ordered both to be thrown into the fire. And as they were being thrown into the flames, Apollonios prayed so that all could hear:

- *"Lord, do not abandon us; reveal yourself and show your power."*

8. A bright, dewy, fresh cloud immediately covered the two men in the flames and extinguished the fire. The crowd that had just mocked the two witnesses and the judge, now astonished, shouted:

- *"The only true God is the God of Christians."*

9. The news of the event reached the governor of Alexandria almost

immediately, who became furious and sent a military detachment without delay to bring the confessors before him.

10. On the way, Apollonios was illuminated by divine Grace and began to catechise the soldiers. Remarkably, those fierce men were overcome by the power of the Word and believed in the Saviour. Arriving in Alexandria, they all appeared before the governor and declared their faith with unwavering spirit. The fierce persecutor of the faithful immediately ordered them to be thrown into the sea to drown, not knowing that in doing so, he was providing them with an extraordinary service, as this took place at the site of Baptism.

11. Later, when the waves washed the bodies of the martyrs ashore, the faithful buried them in a common grave, from which miracles began to occur. Such was the grace granted to Apollonios that not only he himself but those who followed him were honoured with the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

*Ιστορία των μοναχών εν Αιγύπτω. Περί
Απολλωνίου μάρτυρος ιθ'. 1 Εξ./A.J.,
Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (Subsidia
Hagiographica 34), Bruxelles 1961, σελ.
115 έξ.

4. SAINT PACHOMIOS THE GREAT

Introduction

He was born around 291 in Upper Thebaid to pagan parents. As a soldier, he encountered Christianity, was baptised, and became a hermit near the renowned Palamon.

Pachomios is the first to establish monasteries. The first one was in the desert village of Tabennisi. This new way of asceticism quickly gained many admirers. Within 25 years, a series of 11 male monasteries and two female ones were created.

When Pachomios, a plague victim, left this world in 346, his name was well known

for his sanctity and the new institution he established throughout the known world. We celebrate his memory on May 15th.

Once, a philosopher ascended to the monastery of Pachomios, intending to study what kind of people the monks were, and requested to see the elder and speak to him. Not wanting to present himself, Pachomios sent the monk Cornelius to face the visitor, confident that God's grace would not leave his disciple helpless.

The philosopher said to the monk:

- "I have indeed heard that you monks are wise people and teach wise things, and I do not doubt this reputation, but I am surprised that you have come here to our place to practice your teaching, a place where wisdom and prudence abound, as the whole world acknowledges."

Cornelius replied to him:

- "We resemble, it is true, people who came to an olive-producing place to sell olives, and this seems misplaced, but it is known that your olives are used only for producing oil, not for being preserved in

brine and stored. We have come to teach the new use of this fruit. And we are the salt."

The philosopher could not hide his admiration for the astute response, discreetly greeted him, and left.

When he returned to the city, he recounted what he saw and heard at the monastery, proclaiming his belief in the superiority of the monks' wisdom.

With incredible arrogance, a boastful colleague of his declared that he would go to set things right since the first one went after wool and returned shorn.

He then arrived at the monastery and sought the elder. Pachomios, filled with confidence in divine Grace, sent the monk Theodore to discuss the matter. Although he feared facing the philosopher, he could not refuse the abbot.

As soon as the visitor saw the monk, he took an ironic tone and asked him if he knew:

- *"Who died without being born, who was born but never died, and who, although he died, his body did not decay?"*

Theodore had the answer ready:

"Adam died, although he was not born in the usual way, Enoch did not die, and Lot's wife did not melt since her body was transformed into salt."

The philosopher could not help but admit the answer, and, ashamed, he went downhill.

(Βίος Πρώτος Παχωμίου 82/ΒΕΠΕΣ τόμ. 40, σελ. 160 έξ)

Speaking of idolatry, Saint Pachomios said:

- *"It is atheism since it worships non-existent objects. Of course, an idolater may disagree and say that in reality, he also worships the one God, regardless of whether his expressions of worship are directed towards various deities, which, however, are nothing more than specific divine powers, given different names so*

that the faithful can invoke them; after all, the great God is not diminished in this way, but instead becomes more accessible to humans."

"It would certainly be preferable for one to disregard these absurdities, hoping that one day God will open the eyes of these unhappy ones, just as He opened ours so that they can see the truth. However, following the word of the Lord, who commands, '*freely you have received, freely give*' (Matthew 10:8), I will speak briefly on these matters."

"Since the transgression of Adam occurred, people have fallen into delusion, failing to recognise the mandates of the divine breath within them and neglecting their Father and Creator of all the wondrous creation. Then, they fashioned new gods, conforming them to themselves. The evil began when in Paradise the enemy devil, posing as a counsellor, deceived the first parents with '*you shall be as gods*' (Genesis 3:5), and they thought they could separate themselves from their Creator and take His place."

"Of course, the envious one was interested in usurping the deity himself

because naturally, where God would be expelled, his opposite would take the vacant place. Thus, people thought they had become masters but had only acquired a dreadful tyrant. They worshipped lifeless images of themselves, without existence, without life, and the devil behind it all did his job. And behold, the world was filled with filth and stench. Where life disappears, death prevails. And idolatry is the manifestation of death.”

(Περί Παχωμίου και Θεοδώρου
Παραλειπόμενα ΙΖ΄/ΒΕΠΕΣ τόμ. 40. σελ.
218).

5. SAINT HILARION THE GREAT

Introduction

The Saint was born around 290 in a village near Gaza in Palestine to pagan parents. When he was very young, he went to Alexandria for studies, became a Christian, and apprenticed for a few months with the Great Antony.

At fifteen, he returned to his homeland, distributed his wealth, and devoted himself to asceticism. He was the first monk in those parts. Soon, other Christians gathered around him, yearning for a life of solitude and asceticism. Thus, he helped spread monasticism throughout the country.

Since idolatry still prevailed in Palestine, the Saint did not neglect the great duty of spreading the word of God. Many people came to know the new faith through his preaching. He left the worldly in 371. His memory is celebrated on October 21.

After a remarkable miracle, Hilarion became widely known, and large crowds of the sick with various ailments rushed to receive his blessing and to be healed by his prayers. Most of them were pagans but excited by the rich gifts of God shared by the hands of the hermit, they believed and entered the Church. In fact, many also followed the monastic life, thus dedicating themselves to the Lord, Who granted them their health.

Moreover, for the first time, monasticism appeared in those parts around Jordan with the holy Hilarion. He was the first teacher and professor of the heavenly state of monks, an envoy of God, like the elder Anthony in Egypt, to establish the angelic polity in Palestine.

A pagan from Gaza became stuck while driving his chariot and was left paralysed,

unable to move any of his limbs. His friends carried him to the monastery of Hilarion and laid him at the feet of the Saint. The paralytic, whose only part that obeyed his mind was his tongue, pleaded with the saint to free him from his great misfortune.

Hilarion told him,

"I cannot do anything for you before you confess your faith in Him who is about to heal you."

Then, the charioteer steadfastly affirmed that he *"believed in Christ and would abandon his craft and dedicate himself to the service of God."* Immediately, he was healed and fulfilled his promise by becoming a monk at the monastery of Hilarion.

Once, Saint Hilarion, going with a group of his disciples to visit an ascetic who lived in the desert of Cadis, passed through the city of Luza. On that very day, festivities were held in the city in honour of Eosphorus and Aphrodite, and many people from the surrounding areas gathered, including Saracens from nearby settlements.

As soon as this crowd learned of Hilarion's arrival, they left the revelry and sacrifices; although they were pagans, they honoured him greatly because they had heard of his miracles. So men, women, and children gathered and went to the city's outskirts to welcome him. They ran to him with deep respect when they saw him coming, begging him to bless them.

The saint joyfully accepted their expression of love and seized the opportunity to sow the word of God in their hearts.

- "Why have you gathered, poor souls, in this city, worshipping lifeless marbles and demons that dwell in the temples of deception? Worship the true God Who created you, the earth, the heavens, and every being. Leave behind the delusion, come to the Truth."

Then he turned his eyes to heaven and prayed for a long time, weeping, asking God to guide them on the path of salvation. He then turned to the people and said:

- "If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and venerate His holy name, his great

condescension and philanthropy will soon deem you worthy to participate in the Mysteries of the Church."

In unison and without any objection, they all declared their faith in the Saviour. Hilarion commanded that the construction of the city's first church begin at that very moment, using materials from the idols that they had meanwhile destroyed.

With great joy, everyone prepared for baptism, and the first to approach was the pagan priest. He was crowned and adorned, but as soon as he reached the saint, he cast all his ornaments to the ground and proceeded to the baptismal font. The others followed, and late in the evening, after so many people had been converted, Hilarion continued on his way to meet his disciples.

Α. Παπαδοπούλου Κεραμέως, *Ανάλεκτα Ιεροσολυμητικής Σταχυολογίας*. 1898 (ανατύπωση 1963) τόμ. V, σελ. 92 έξ. και 114 έξ.

6. SAINT PAPHNUTIOS THE GREAT

Introduction

The only thing we know from the youth of Paphnutios is that he came from Egypt. During the persecution of Maximinius (308), he confessed his faith and was sentenced to forced labour in the mines. When he was released, he became a monk, following St. Anthony's order. Later, we find him as a bishop in Thebaid. He participated in the First Ecumenical Council and opposed a proposal to impose mandatory celibacy for the clergy. The Lord called him to Himself around 360.

It was said about Abba Paphnutios that he exercised self-control and had not drunk

wine for many years. One day, while travelling, he stumbled upon a group of robbers drinking. The chief robber recognised him and knew that he did not drink. However, seeing him very tired and wanting to tease him, he filled a cup and offered it, simultaneously threatening him with a sword. His voice sounded heavy.

- *"If you don't drink it, I will kill you!"*

Then the elder, realising that he would act more according to God's will by attempting to win over the robber rather than insisting on his own restraint, took it and drank.

Paphnutios' behaviour made the sinner repent, and with tears in his eyes, he said:

- *"Forgive me, Abba, for causing you distress."*

The righteous man then said to him:

- *"I am certain that God, thanks to this cup, will show compassion to you in this life and the next."*

The chief robber said:

- *“God is my witness; from now on, I will not mistreat anyone.”*

Thus, the elder won over the entire group, setting aside his own will to accomplish the Lord's will.

Αποφθέγματα *Πατέρων,*
Παφνούτιος/Migne PG τόμ. 65, στήλη 777
C εξ.

7. SAINT ABRAMIOS

A renowned ascetic who lived in the fourth century (296-366), his parents forced him to marry when he was very young. However, within a week, he left his

wife to follow a life of prayer and asceticism.

After more than ten years of spiritual struggles, the Bishop of Edessa entrusted him with the Christianization of Tainia, a town near Lampsacus on the Hellespont. His Syrian biography refers to it as Beth-Kidna. The following piece contains the incidents of the Christianization of Tainia. His memory is celebrated on October 29.

Near Lampsacus, there was a town called Tainia. Its inhabitants were among the last Greeks who insisted on idolatry. The area's bishop would periodically send clergy and monks to instruct them in the faith of Christ, but it was futile; no one could convince them. On the contrary, those who went there risked facing the fury of demonic forces and left, chased away by terrifying threats. The bishop was at a loss as to what to do to make those hard-hearted people repent. Then he remembered Abramios. He decided to assign this remarkable ascetic, unmatched in virtue and piety, the task of redeeming the stubborn idol worshippers. In fact, he contemplated ordaining him as a priest, confident that with the cooperation of

divine grace, he would soon need to baptise the new believers he would lead to the Church.

Immediately, therefore, he arose and set out with a large entourage to go to the hermitage of Abramios. Upon arriving there and greeting him fraternally, he explained what he sought from him and earnestly begged him to accept the holy mission. The ascetic initially felt uncomfortable with this high honour bestowed upon him, for the bishop had come to find him, as he certainly did not consider himself worthy of such a thing, and for the heavy responsibility they placed on his shoulders, as he genuinely felt incapable of carrying out such an important task.

He then responded to the words of the archpriest:

- "Who am I, that you deem me worthy, my Lord, to assign such a great ministry to me? Leave me, for the name of Christ, in my mediocrity and weakness."

The bishop said to him:

Water From the Desert

- *"I know well, my beloved child, how much divine Grace has enriched you in words and deeds. Therefore, do not refuse to offer your services to this work that will benefit many souls and ensure you just recompense."*

Abramios, still unyielding, replied:

- *"Please, leave me in my cell to mourn for my many sins."*

Then the bishop spoke harshly to him:

- *"You have abandoned the world and have been practising virtues for so many years, and while it seems that you adhere to every divine command with great precision, I do not know how obedience has escaped you."*

As soon as the elder heard these words, his eyes filled with tears and, sighing regretfully, he said:

- *"Why do you want to elevate me, my lord, so high, me the wretched and useless? How did you think I would be useful, I the insignificant?"*

And the bishop said:

- "Here where you are, alone and desolate, you certainly only occupy yourself with your personal perfection. But if you follow the path I am indicating, can you imagine how great the benefit will be for thousands of souls? Do you not know that caring for the good of others is the greatest proof of love for God and that this is the most significant gain for your own soul?"

"What greater service could you offer to the Lord? He had told his beloved disciple, *'If you love me, Peter, tend my sheep.'* He is so concerned about the care of the Church's flock that he considers it the greatest sign of love for Him."

With these paternal words of the bishop, Abramios' reluctance was overcome, and he followed the spiritual shepherd to the city, where he was ordained a priest. A few days later, he embarked on the great mission, accompanied by the blessings of the Church, and took the path of duty, filled with emotion and humility.

When Abramios arrived in Tainia, frightened by the deep darkness of

irreverence he encountered—for the people there, as Paul says, *“exchanged the glory of the Only Begotten for the beauty of an idol”*—he prayed from the depths of his heart.

- “Compassionate Master, Christ God, the only Good, You who easily forget and forgive the wickedness of men, You who, from the overflow of Your love, created man and continue to protect and govern him, do not ignore these Your creations here, who are victims of the devil; redeem them from the tyrannical grasp of the enemy and grant them the ability to know You. Help me, too, to contribute to the building of Your kingdom. You know nothing else has prompted me to undertake this work but only the zeal to save souls.”

The priest's first action was to care for the construction of a church. With money he received from a friend, he built a magnificent church and began to conduct the Liturgy regularly and to pray:

“Gather, Lord, your scattered sheep here and there, in this newly built fold, opening to them the entrance of salvation, with the awareness of your presence.

Glorify your name, for you are God, full of mercy; you desire the sinner's return more than their condemnation."

With these prayers, Abramios gained courage and enthusiasm and began his mission to sow the truth in people's hearts.

One day, as divine grace indicated, he went to the pagan shrines, and with his prayers, he demolished the statues and the demonic idols. When their worshippers arrived to venerate and saw their gods fallen to the ground, they immediately understood what had happened, for the reputation of Abramios' presence among them had long spread.

They seized wood and stones, and, with unprecedented fury, they ran, found the saint, and struck him so that he seemed to be dying. They left him helpless and departed, believing he would soon die. However, as darkness fell, the man of God managed to enter the temple and, falling before the altar, began to pray for the salvation of his tormentors, beseeching the Lord to cleanse their minds from the darkness of delusion.

At that time, some pagans were passing by outside the temple, and seeing that Abramios had not died, they entered, seized him, and mercilessly beat him again. Then, they tied him up with ropes and dragged him through the streets of the town, stoning him.

When they got tired, they tossed him into a corner, not caring whether he was dead or alive. The saint still retained his senses and prayed:

- *"How long, Lord, will this martyrdom last? When will you show your mercy for these lost children of yours?"*

Later, he managed to move and reached the temple, where he resumed his supplications.

In the morning, the unbelievers passing by the temple heard him singing. As if what they had done was not enough, they entered again, tied him up, carried him away, and threw him far from the inhabited area.

For this ultimate cruelty, Abramios did not hold a grudge. On the contrary, when he managed to return, he treated them

with love and gentleness as if nothing terrible had happened, having as his only aim their salvation.

Indeed, this priest's behaviour brought about its own results. Those unbelieving and hard-hearted people gathered and discussed what each one had begun to think as they felt their souls being stirred by the miracle. They said:

- "Abramios, even though we have shown such dreadful behaviour towards him, treats us with such kindness and faces our wickedness with courage and bravery. He seems to have complete trust in the reciprocity of his God, who must truly be eternal and immortal. How else would he have such patience? After all, he so easily destroyed our statues without any of our gods reacting to this offence."

With these words and such thoughts, their souls were prepared and warmed, and they rushed to meet the priest. Upon entering the temple, they glorified the God who sent them salvation through His servant and asked to be catechised and become members of the Church. Abramios, overjoyed, called them close and began the catechesis, outlining the joy of the

illuminated and sealed faithful with the seal of the Spirit. About a thousand were baptised in the following days, and the temple was always filled with the newly baptised, whom the saint guided in the life according to Christ.

A long time passed, and Abramios felt that if he remained among his spiritual children, he risked adapting to worldly life. Therefore, he decided to return to his solitude and left one night without telling anyone anything. Previously, he had prayed for the flock, asking for its preservation. He also sought the Lord's mercy for himself, the weak one, praying that his retreat would be forgiven.

When the morning came, the faithful inhabitants of the town went to the temple but did not find the priest. Their hearts were filled with anxiety, and they searched everywhere for him without success. Disheartened, they turned to the local bishop and spoke to him about the disappearance of their shepherd. He understood very well the reason for the hermit's departure, comforted the people, and chose from among them the most virtuous, ordaining some as priests and others as deacons. He established them in

Tainia with a paternal blessing that the life of the Church there would be peaceful and fruitful.

Συμεών του Μεταφραστού, *Μην Μάρτιος*,
Βίος Αβραμίου Ζ, ΙΔ/Migne P.G τόμ. 115,
στήλ. 52-601.

8. SAINT MAKARIOS OF EGYPT

Introduction

He was born around 300 in a village in Upper Egypt. When he turned 30, he practised asceticism in the Nitrian desert, where he became associated with Saint Anthony. However, he spent most of his life of ascesis in Syria. At the age of forty, he was ordained a presbyter. He quickly became renowned for his holy life.

God granted him gifts to heal illnesses and to prophesy. In old age, the Arian bishop of Alexandria, Lucius, exiled him to a small island in the Nile for a time. In 390, he exchanged his earthly life for the heavenly one. We celebrate his memory on January 19.

Once, Abba Makarios was travelling with his disciple. As they were approaching their destination, he sent his student ahead to notify them, and the young man accidentally encountered a pagan priest and frivolously shouted at him:

- *"Where are you running to, demon?"*

The priest was offended, and after striking him with his staff, severely wounding him to the point of making him fall unconscious, he continued running on his way.

As he advanced a little, he met Makarios, who, seeing him running, thought he was in danger and blessed him:

- *"May you escape, blessed one."*

The astonished priest stopped, approached, and asked the abba:

- *"Why do you pray and bless me?"*

The elder replied:

- *"Because I saw you struggling desperately."*

The priest said to him:

- "Your greeting very moved me. I am sure that you are a man of God, while just before, another monk, very wicked, insulted me, and I killed him in a fit of rage."

The elder understood that it was his disciple, but before he could run to help him, the pagan fell at his feet and begged him to make him a monk as well. Makarios agreed, and so together, they ran and carried the injured novice to the nearby monastery.

Seeing the priest of the idols coming along with the abbot, the monks were surprised but soon agreed to make him their brother. After all, he was not the first pagan to come to Christ, thanks to Makarios, who always believed that **bad words provoke even the good, while a good word softens even the bad.**

* Μακαρίου του Αιγυπτίου,
Αποφθέγματα 39/ΒΕΠΕΣ τόμ. 42, σελ. 267
έξ.

Once there came difficult times for the monks of Egypt. The governor of the land, incited by the heretics, began to hunt them down. To rid himself of them once and for all, he gathered them from their caves and sent them, loaded onto a small boat, to an islet of the Nile, where the only inhabitants were a few pagans. There was also an old temple, served by a superstitious priest.

As soon as the ship with the monks, and of course, Makarios among them, arrived at the shore, the demons of the place entered the priest's daughter and pushed her to run like crazy through the village streets. The villagers followed her, and she led them before the newcomers. Then the demons were heard speaking with the girl's voice:

- *“What are you looking for here, you people of God? Will we not be able to survive even on this deserted island? Will you chase us everywhere? You drove us out of mansions and huts, and now you have come to this last refuge of ours? They sent you here to silence you, and your persecutors have only succeeded in*

destroying us. So, we are leaving from here too."

At that moment, the priest's daughter, abandoned by the demons, fell to the ground and appeared lifeless. The monks disembarked and rushed to lift the girl and return her healed to her father.

The islanders were astonished by the events and waited anxiously for what would happen next. Makarios and his companions immediately began teaching, and soon, all those people became Christians and were baptised. They also demolished the temple and built a church, where they now worshipped the true God, freed from the darkness of delusion, thanks to the light brought by the exiled monks.

Σωκράτους, *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία* IV, ΚΔ/Migne P.G. τόμ. 67, στήλ. 524 έξ.
Σωζομενού, *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία* VI, Κ/Migne P.G τόμ. 67, υπήλ 1341 έξ.
Θεοδωρήτου, *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία* IV, ΙΗ/Migne P.G. τόμ. 82, στήλ. 1165 έξ.

9. ABBAS KOPRIS

1. Around the end of the fourth century, the abba was 90 years old. We know very little about his sanctified life. As an elder, he directed a small monastery with 50 monks. He was a very spiritual person and combined asceticism with missionary work. Many of the incidents of his life are related to this.

30. The ascetic Koprís was adorned with the gift of miracles. Once, when he was in the city, he encountered a Manichaean heretic who was speaking and leading many into his deception. Realising that he could not hold his own in a discussion with him, he challenged him by suggesting that they both enter the fire to prove who had God with them.

31. The crowd watching was thrilled by the idea and immediately lit the fire, urging the two opponents to see who would remain unharmed. The Manichaeon, frightened, insisted that Koprīs go in first since he had the idea after all.

The elder made the sign of the cross and stepped into the flames. They parted marvellously so that although he remained among them for a long time, he was not harmed at all.

32. The Manichaeon was preparing to flee, but the people seized him and pushed him into the fire. Naturally, he burned like a candle, and when they pulled him out, he was in a terrible condition. They disgraced him in the streets and threw him aside.

Meanwhile, Koprīs and another crowd went to the church to glorify the Lord.

(Παλλαδίου, *Λαυσαϊκή Ιστορία* ΝΔ' / Migne P.G. τόμ. 34 στήλ. 1155).

One day, Geronda Koprīs was sitting outside his cell talking to some visitors. Suddenly, they saw among them a farmer holding a container of sand. The strangers

asked what he was doing there and learned the following story.

28. The area's land was not fertile at all, and the peasants barely managed, after much effort, to secure double the amount during the harvest compared to what they had sown. Those who had been catechised in the faith by the holy hermit asked him to pray for their labours to yield more.

The man of God replied that if they continued to have faith in God, even the sand of the desert could bear fruit. Then the peasants all came together to the elder, carrying a large amount of sand, and they insisted that he bless it. Koprís wished for their supplication to be fulfilled according to their faith.

29. The peasants sowed their fields after mixing the blessed sand with the seed, and, paradoxically and wonderfully, within a few months, the harvest was abundant, and the yield was excellent throughout the area. From then on, every year before the sowing, every farmer would come to the saint to have him bless the sand, and the elder, of course, never denied this offering to his spiritual children.

33. Once, he passed by a pagan temple where some heathens were sacrificing to their idols. He approached them and said:

- "If, even though you want to be considered rational, you sacrifice to irrational idols, you must admit that, in reality, you are more irrational than they are. The truth of God has long abolished the deception of idols."

As soon as those people heard these words, they abandoned the sacrifice, ran after him, and, after a while, entered the Church's flock.

34. The Monk had a garden in a nearby town, which he entrusted to a poor man to cultivate and send some vegetables to the brotherhood. One day, a pagan entered the garden and stole some cabbages. When he returned home, he tried for many hours to cook them, but they did not soften, and the water he poured over them did not heat up either.

Seeing the miracle, the pagan took the cabbages and climbed to the elder's hermitage, asking for forgiveness for his

wrongdoing and pleading to be instructed in the faith of Christ. The Monk immediately fulfilled his wishes.

In fact, at that moment, he was hosting three brothers who had visited him in his cell, and the cabbages were just right for dinner. So he cooked them, and they ate, thanking God for the double joy and delight of a man's salvation and the bountiful table.

Ιστορία των μοναχών εν Αιγύπτω, Περί Κόπρη L, 26 έξ. και 33 έξ. / Festugiere, A. J., Historia Mona.

10. ABBA APOLLO

Introduction

He lived at the end of the fourth century in the famous Egyptian desert of Thebaid. He chose the life of renunciation when he was 15 years old. His great asceticism and holy life attracted the Grace of God, which gave him the strength to perform many miracles. At the same time, he attracted many monks around him who sought to devote themselves entirely to God. The monastery led by Apollo had 500 monks. Their life was remarkable, so almost all of them performed miracles.

21. At one time in Egypt, idolatry was so rampant that even the most insignificant vegetables were deified, in addition to the

most common animals. The holy elder Apollo explained the reasons for this polytheism:

22. “Our pagan ancestors,” he said, “deified the bull because it was their main helper in agriculture, securing their food; the water of the Nile, for by flooding the fields, it made the land fertile; the soil since they could see well how much more fruitful theirs was in comparison to other countries.

23. They worshipped dogs, monkeys, and other animals and plants because they became, for many, a reason for salvation at the time of the flight of the Jews; that is, each person deified that which, while occupied with it, did not follow Pharaoh in the pursuit and thanks to which they thus escaped death from the drowning in the Red Sea.”

24. This tragic situation had recently changed, and this was thanks to Apollo. Idolaters lived in the surrounding villages where he established the hermitage.

25. Indeed, in one town, there was a famous temple where a statue was kept, which was highly revered in the area.

It was also customary to carry this idol around the villages and perform orgiastic rituals until they reached the river, supposedly praying for its waters.

26. Once, Apollo happened to pass by the site of the ceremony with his entourage. As soon as he saw that large crowd violently demonised, he knelt and prayed to the Saviour, and the miracle happened immediately. An invisible force surrounded the idolaters, and they could not leave a particular area. They pushed each other under the scorching sun, unable to understand what had happened to them. Their priests then declared that a Christian must have been present and had struck them in this way, advising them to turn to Apollo, who resided in the nearby desert, if they wanted to escape the evil that had befallen them.

27. When those who were somewhat farther away heard the cries of the trapped, they ran to see what had occurred, learned of the suspicions, and said that they had seen Apollo in the area just before. Since something had to be done to free the trapped, those outside ran

and brought some bulls, attempting to pull the idol.

28. However, it was in vain. Both it and its worshippers remained motionless. Then, not knowing what to do, they sent some people to Apollo, promising him that if he freed them from the evil that had befallen them, they would abandon the delusion of the idols.

29. as soon as he heard the representatives, the man of God came down from his hermitage and broke the chains after praying. The redeemed, enthusiastic and determined to believe in the true God and their saviour, rushed together to thank Apollo, offering the dreadful idol to the fire.

The hermit immediately began the catechesis and soon introduced them to the Church. Many even became monks and entered the monasteries. So great was the elder's reputation that crowds came to the faith every day, so that no pagan was left in the area.

30. Over time, Apollo gained significant influence over the inhabitants and often

came down from his cell to enforce peace when disputes arose.

36. One time, pagans from another region came to a village of Christians and made demands on the estates. Things reached the brink of armed conflict.

Then Apollo rushed to calm the spirits. However, the leader of the pagans, a wild and arrogant man, would not be swayed by words and swore that only with blood would their dispute be settled. The saint replied to him:

- "Let it be as you have chosen. But know that the dispute will be settled only with your blood. No one else will be killed. And your corpse will remain unburied, food for the predators."

37. The battle began, and indeed, no one else was harmed except for the leader, whom his friends hastily buried in the sand. The next morning, they saw that the vultures and hyenas had discovered and devoured the corpse. Unable to deny the miracle, they acknowledged Apollo and regarded him as a prophet.

*Ιστορία των μοναχών εν Αιγύπτω, Περί
Απολλώ η', 21-30 και 36-37 / Festugiere,
A. J., Historia Monachorum in Aegypto
(Subsidia Hagiographica 34), Bruxelles
1961, σελ. 54-58 και 61.*

11. THE HIEROMONKS EULOGIOS AND PROTOGENIS

Introduction

When the Arian emperor Valens (364-378) reigned in Constantinople, his like-minded governor of Syria expelled the Orthodox bishop from Edessa of Osroene and replaced him with a heretic. The flock reacted by fleeing. Men, women, and children abandoned the city. Then, the governor ordered all the clergy to present themselves to him.

Speaking with their two leaders, Eulogios and Protopenis, he vainly tried to convince them to submit to the new bishop. Faced with their persistent refusal, the governor exiled all the clergy to Thrace. However, the Orthodox people of the region welcomed them with honours.

As soon as Emperor Valens learned of the welcome they received, he became angry and ordered a new exile. However, this time, he sent them in pairs to distant places in Thrace, Arabia, and Thebais. Evlogios and Protogenis thus arrived in Antinoë of Thebaid.

When the persecution ended, the exiles returned to their homeland. Then Eulogios became bishop in Edessa and Protogenis in the nearby Karas, "a city covered in thorny Greek vegetation and much in need of hard work."

In a persecution of the clergy of Edessa, Emperor Valens sent them off two by two to various distant places, ensuring the separation of those among them who were siblings. Elder Eulogios was sent along with the hieromonk Protogenius to the city of Thebaid, Antinoë. With the permission of the local bishop, the two holy men actively participated in the Church's activities and did everything they could to support the faithful.

They only realised that the flock was small because most of the residents of the

diocese were still pagans. Initially, this fact troubled them, but then they decided to do something to improve the situation. Thus, Eulogios locked himself in a small house and began all-day and all-night prayers to God. On the other hand, Protogenis, who was educated and a good calligrapher, opened a school and started teaching children to write and read from sacred books. In this way, he prepared the ground for an upcoming catechism in the truths of faith.

One day, a child was absent from class, and when Protogenis learned that the child was sick, he went to his house and, with fervent prayer, was able to drive away the illness. As soon as this became known, more parents sent their children to the teacher and frequently invited him to their homes to seek his help.

Protogenis demanded that people be baptised and become members of the Church to receive his support. The people, admiring the virtue of the ascetic and the power granted to him by God, willingly obeyed, thus securing double benefit.

When the teacher convinced someone to become a Christian, he would

immediately take them to the little house of Eulogios and ask the elder to lead the baptism. Evlogios usually did not want to interrupt his prayer. Still, Protogenis reminded him that the primary purpose was the salvation of those who wandered in delusion, far from the light of Christ.

Those who learned that Protogenis was giving the lead to Eulogios, who seemed to do nothing miraculous, were puzzled because they considered the former's virtue much greater, especially since he had also been endowed with miraculous power. Protogenis certainly knew what he was doing well.

Later, after some time, the clergy persecution stopped, and the two hieromonks began to return to their homeland. Then crowds of faithful from Antioch, old and new, led by the worthy shepherd of that diocese, bid them farewell with tears, as they felt they were losing two people whose parallel efforts had brought so many God-pleasing results and given so many wonderful fruits.

Water From the Desert

12. THE MONKS BATTHAIOS, HALAS, HELIODOROS, AND OTHERS

Introduction

For the group of these monks, we have very little information. They are among those many relatively unknown figures we mentioned at the beginning of the book. They must have lived in the early 4th century in Syria. Batthaios, Halas, and the elder Heliodoros practised asceticism in Nisibis on the slopes of Mount Sigrion. Their efforts to attain dispassion became renowned. The other monks mentioned in the following excerpt also lived in Syria and excelled in ascetic struggles.

Batthaios, Halas, and Heliodoros distinguished themselves among the monks for their great self-restraint, fasting, and insomnia. They also practiced in Syria, where Christianity was spreading at a very slow pace. This was not so much due to a lack of enlightened believers — who, on the contrary, were present and had a brave spirit and a missionary disposition — but

rather to the hatred and persecution from the local inhabitants.

Of course, the established ascetics did not retaliate against the malice and patiently endured the hardships imposed on them by the pagans. Such were the most austere Batthaios, Halas, and Heliodoros, as well as Valentinus from Emesa, Theodoros the Apamean, Marosas from Neichila, Bassos, Bassonios, and Paul from Tlemisus.

All these and many others gathered together and founded a large monastery near Jugato, where they lived until old age, practising the works of a life in Christ.

However, the flame ignited by the monastery's founding gradually ignited the country, and one might even say that God gave them years to facilitate the spread of faith. Indeed, it wasn't long before crowds of Syrians, Persians, and Saracens abandoned their idols and embraced the faith of Christ. Many even followed the monastic life and lived in the monastery.

Σωζομενός, *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία* VI, ΛΔ' / Migne P.G. τόμ. 67, στήλη 1396.

13. THE MONK SERAPION

Introduction

We have no information about his life except for what his brief biography provides. He must have lived in the 4th century. He was educated, studying the Holy Scriptures constantly and knew them by heart. As a monk, he had neither a cell nor a permanent place of asceticism. He preferred to wander through various countries, discuss, learn, offer his services to people, and lead them to Christ. In his short life, he visited Asia, Athens, Laconia, and Rome, connecting his stay in these

places with constructive and missionary incidents.

The fathers often recounted tales of Serapion, who was even called "Sindonite," because his entire attire was a sheet. He was renowned for his perfect poverty and his memorisation of sacred texts. He could not find peace in a cell, as by nature, he preferred to practice virtue within society.

Serapion, therefore, once, with the help of a friend, managed to sell himself as a slave at the slave market for twenty coins to a group of Greek actors who performed tragedies and worshipped Dionysus. He took the money and hid it while he himself faithfully carried out the orders of his masters, burdening them only for a bit of bread and water while at the same time repeating all day the texts he knew by heart.

Over time, the leader of the actors began to pay attention to Serapion's monologues, and gradually, the other members of the troupe did the same. The hermit often volunteered to wash their feet to give them the opportunity to pay more attention to the divine words he recited. In

the end, he succeeded in making them Christians.

Thus, they ceased to worship Dionysus, were baptised, and followed the modest and pious life of a believer. Then, they suggested to Serapion that they would free him, repaying him for their own liberation from spiritual slavery.

The man of God overjoyed that so many souls had been saved, revealed his secret to them.

- *"I was," he said to them, "a free Egyptian and I was living as a hermit in the desert, but I pitied your souls, and for the sake of their salvation, I sold myself into slavery. However, since God has deemed it good to save you using my humiliation, take back the money you gave to buy me, and I will leave to help others."*

The actors pleaded with him to stay with them, to be their father and leader, but they could not convince him. Then they said to him:

- *"Give the money to the poor because that was the engagement and the beginning of our salvation, and since you*

want to leave, you are free; just let us see you often."

As Serapion left there, he headed to the area of Laconia where he heard that a nobleman was a Manichaeian, and he and his family, although otherwise, he was virtuous. He did the same in this case as he did with the actors. He sold himself as a slave and, within two years, rescued his master and his family from the cursed heresy, bringing them back to the Church.

Then his master freed him and regarded him as his brother, rather his father, praising God for sending him!

Παλλαδίου, Λαυσαϊκή Ιστορία XXXVII, 1
έξ. και 8 / Εκδ. Μπουγάτσου, Ν.Θ.
Μπατιστάτου, Δ.Μ., Παλλαδίου, Λαυσαϊκή
Ιστορία (Βυζαντινή Βιβλιοθήκη), Αθήναι
1970, τόμ. 1ος, σελ. 198 έξ.

14. SAINT SYMEON THE ANCIENT

Introduction

We know very little about this holy man. He lived in the 4th century in the desert of Palestine, leading a very ascetic life. God adorned him with many gifts. One of those that made a particular impression on simple people was his power over the wild beasts of the desert. He performed many miracles. Arabs, who lived nomadically in those parts, came to know the true God near him. For more solitude, he later fled to Mount Amanos. But even there, he could not avoid people. On the contrary, he acted as a missionary. Afterwards, he travelled to Mount Sinai, where he founded two monasteries. He worked there to cultivate the souls of the young monks until his death.

With his amazing miracles, Symeon had become very well known. He managed to lead many of the inhabitants of the area,

who prided themselves on being descendants of Ishmael, to the faith. However, longing to find the peace he lacked, he was forced to leave his cave, and after travelling a long way, he arrived at the mountain called Amanos.

This place had long been a centre for pagan rituals. This remarkable man, saddened by the degradation of human nature he encountered there, once again set aside his desire for solitude and engaged in cultivating the spiritual field entrusted to him by the Lord. With many and various miracles, he planted piety in the people's hearts and guided them to salvation.

Θεοδώρητου Κύρου, *Φιλόθεος Ιστορία*
ΣΤ' / Migne P.G. τόμ. 82, στήλ. 1360B.

15. SAINT ABRAHAM

Introduction

He is known as Abraham of Charres. He was born in 350 in Mesopotamia and died in Constantinople shortly after 422. From a very young age, he devoted himself to asceticism. Later, he brought a village in Lebanon near Emesa to Christ. He returned to his beloved desert. However, his reputation had spread so widely that he was appointed bishop in Charres against his will. In his new mission, he succeeded

entirely and enforced Christianity. Emperor Theodosius II invited him to the capital and honoured him greatly. There, the saint exchanged his earthly life for the true one. The Church celebrates his memory on February 14.

Abraham began his monastic life as a hermit and became a high priest, but he never ceased living an ascetic life. He was Persian, and for the first time in his homeland, he came to know monasticism and devoted himself to ascetic practices. As those who knew him well said, he tamed his bodily passions so much with vigils, standing, and fasting that at one point, he risked becoming paralysed, as he reached a point where he could not walk. He was saved from this danger by divine Grace, and as a counteroffer to this heavenly concession, he decided to settle in a village in Lebanon, where he learned that there were people who refused to accept the faith to try to save them.

Therefore, he disguised himself as a merchant and pretended, upon arriving there with his companions, that he was interested in buying coconuts, the area's product. He rented a house, paying a

substantial deposit, and in the first few days, they lived quietly without attracting anyone's attention.

Later, they began to quietly chant hymns from the Liturgy, so the first curious onlookers who eavesdropped called the others. All together, after much discussion, men and women decided to confine them inside the house by piling dirt in front of the door. However, when the villagers saw that Abraham and his companions remained indifferent and continued their prayers instead of reacting, they stopped in amazement, pulled back the dirt, and asked them to leave immediately.

However, that day, the tax collectors arrived in the village coincidentally, demanding the debts and threatening harsh punishments for those who could not pay. The forgetful recluse immediately forgot the wrong the villagers intended to do to him, and just as Christ, nailed to the cross, prayed for his crucifiers, so did Abraham advise the collectors to treat the people without harshness.

When it became necessary for someone to act as a guarantor for a payment, he offered to secure a substantial amount in a

few days. Naturally, the villagers regretted what they had thought to do against the recluse and humbly asked for forgiveness. They even begged him to become their permanent defender. After all, the village was inhabited by free, smallholding farmers, and there was no chief.

Abraham preferred to go immediately to the nearby town to find the money for the guarantee. Very soon, he returned to the village with the necessary amount. This fulfillment of his promise made the villagers insist more insistently on him becoming their lord. Then, he promised to obey if they guaranteed that they would establish a church.

And so it happened. The next day, Abraham was going around with the villagers to the best parts of the place, looking for a suitable location to construct the first church. He chose a prominent spot and immediately set to work.

Very soon, the newly built church needed a priest, and people said they would accept no one but him, their master, whom they also wanted as their spiritual shepherd. Abraham became a presbyter and, from this position, led many into the

light of Christ for three years. Later, he returned to his ascetic practices.

Θεοδωρήτου Κύρου, *Φιλόθεος Ιστορία*,
1Ζ' / Migne P.G. τόμ. 82, στήλ. 1420 έξ.

16. SAINT MELANIA

Introduction

She was born in 349 in Rome to noble parents. She married young and became a widow at the age of 22. Her intense desire to dedicate herself entirely to the Christian life led her to leave her six-year-old child in a guardian's care and go to Jerusalem. She built a women's monastery there and devoted herself to prayer and asceticism. At the age of 60, she made a brief journey to Rome to attend to the spiritual salvation of her relatives, particularly her namesake granddaughter, who encouraged her to embrace the monastic life. She died in Jerusalem in 410.

Saint Melania, upon learning that her namesake granddaughter, who was married, intended to abandon worldly life, feared that the cause of the spouses' separation might be some false teaching or heresy or any possible disagreement in their characters. Thus, although she was old, she travelled by sea from Caesarea and reached Rome in twenty days.

The first person she encountered was the fortunate Apronianus, the well-known pagan husband of her niece Abita, who, after a few days, convinced him to accept catechesis and become a Christian. At the same time, she took care to instil the true faith in her granddaughter and her husband Pinianos and catechised her daughter-in-law Albina, her son's wife. She did not stop at these alone but also showed them that their true interest was to abandon all their possessions and seek refuge in the modest and peaceful monastic state, fleeing from the doomed Rome.

Her success was certainly not easy at all, as she had to confront the social establishment of the capital with the families of the senators, who saw their

order dissolving through her actions. However, the saint told them:

- "My children, four hundred years ago, the warning was written: 'The last hour is upon us.' Why do you continue to meddle in the futile affairs of this world? I fear the days of the Antichrist will come, and you will not have the chance to enjoy your inheritances and the riches you are accumulating."

With these words, she persuaded those who were envious of their good lives and led them to a monastic life. Even her son, Publicola, after she catechised him, she sent him to Sicily, where he founded a monastery.

Then she sold all her remaining property, took the money, and travelled to Jerusalem. There, in the holy city, she stayed for forty days, generously scattering her wealth on good works, until the Lord called her to Himself in deep old age, in peaceful gentleness. She had even managed to establish a monastery, securing all the necessary income for it.

As soon as all those catechised by Melania left Rome, a great evil broke out.

Just as it had been foretold in the prophecies, countless hordes of barbarians surged into the city, leaving nothing unscathed. They destroyed whatever they could not seize, slaughtered and dishonoured, so the once blissful Rome, adorned for twelve centuries by consuls and emperors, became a lamentable ruin.

Seeing this devastation, those who were saved thanks to Melania and others who opposed her glorified the almighty God, who brought about these circumstances to teach everyone that only those who surrendered entirely to Him, with the care of the saint, escaped annihilation.

Παλλαδίου, Λαυσαϊκή Ιστορία LIV, 3-7 / Εκδ. Μπουγάτσου, Ν.Θ. Μπατιστάτου, Δ.Μ., Παλλαδίου, Λαυσαϊκή Ιστορία (Βυζαντινή Βιβλιοθήκη), Αθήναι 1972, τόμ. 2ος, σελ. 36 έξ.

17. SAINT MELANIA THE YOUNGER

Introduction

She was born in Rome in 383 and was named after her grandmother, the blessed Melania. From a young age, she loved the ascetic life. However, when she turned 13, her parents married her to Valerius Pinianus. They had two children, who died at a young age. At that point, Melania convinced her husband to live the rest of their lives in continence. They began to live ascetically. In 417, they visited Jerusalem. There, they built two monasteries, one for women and one for men. The blessed woman managed the women's monastery and spiritually guided the approximately 40 virgins who lived in asceticism there. The spiritual leader of the monastery was the monk Gerontius, who later wrote about her life. She departed to Christ in 439. Our Church commemorates her on December 31.

The Lord, for whose sake Melania worked hard, knows well how many holy people she has served and to how many pious individuals she has been useful, either by helping them financially or by supporting them morally, and how many Jews, idolaters, and heretics she has brought to the path of God, spending every ounce of herself for this cause.

At one point, she decided to go to Constantinople to meet her uncle Volosianos, a governor of old Rome who had not yet renounced the idols. The official Lausos welcomed her with respect, befitting the occasion and led her to the palace, where her uncle was lying in bed. As soon as he saw her dressed in the humble garb of a nun, he, who was surrounded by so much worldly glory, was very saddened and, with tears in his eyes, said to her escort:

- *"This creature, whom you see now having surrendered herself to such poverty and asceticism, was born and raised in luxury, being the pride of our family."*

Melania seized the opportunity, caught by her uncle's words, and replied:

- "My lord, you see that I have despised both glory and wealth and pleasure to gain the eternal goods that the Creator and ruler of the world grants to those who truly trust Him. Therefore, I implore you, just as you enjoyed the world's fleeting pleasures for so many years, to come now to be baptised so that you may also enjoy the eternal goods. Free yourself from the demonic delusion to avoid the eternal condemnation that awaits the idols and their followers."

Volosianos, seeing his niece's zeal to make him a Christian, feared that she might think of discussing this matter with the emperor, who would then pressure him to be baptised, and said:

- "I invoke your piety and ask you not to deprive me of the joy of embracing your faith freely and without compulsion; moreover, as you believe, God created us, bestowing upon us free will. I want to become a Christian and be freed from the burden of my sins, but if I do it for the sake of the emperor, I will have acted out of fear and will lose the reward that my coming will bring me with my own intention."

However, Melania was eager to lead her uncle to baptism because she feared he might die in the meantime, and she spoke about it to the venerable bishop Proclus. He immediately rushed to the side of the sick pagan, and after persistent discussions about the issue of salvation, he managed to offer him positive assistance.

The highly intelligent prefect understood, of course, that what was happening was Melania's doing, but he had already been captivated by Proclus' words and had converted to the faith. So instead of reprimanding her, he told her one day when he saw her:

- *"If there were only three men like Proclus, there would be no pagan left today."*

When Melania was in the capital, the city and the entire territory were shaken by the terrible schism caused by Nestorius' heresy, and many people, especially the most unsuspecting, were greatly scandalised.

The holy woman entered the struggle for orthodoxy and sat and discussed with the most prominent figures, senators,

officials, and scholars daily, supporting them in their faith. Being spiritually gifted, she illuminated those who approached her and helped many of those who were deceived into returning to orthodox beliefs and all the wavering ones to align with the Church. In general, no one left her presence without significantly benefiting in their spiritual life.

It was, therefore, natural that the envious enemy of truth, the devil, would be disturbed by Melania's salvific work, her actions for the sake of the Church, and by the redemption of her soul. Thus, he disguised himself as a dark-skinned young man and appeared before her, saying:

- "You have destroyed me; how long will you ruin my plans? Know that you will not escape me; I will crush you; either I will manage to slander you to the kings and to those who trust you, or I will strike you with bodily pains that will make you seek death. Then you will see how you will cease to disturb me."

The nun immediately uttered the name of the Lord, and the devil disappeared. She then ran to call Lausus and report the event to him, but before she could finish

recounting her vision, she was seized by terrible pains in her back. The agony was such that for three hours, she couldn't utter a single word. Meanwhile, a divine liturgy was held to restore her health, and she recovered a little. For six days, the pain showed no signs of subsiding, and each day, it intensified precisely at the moment the dark-skinned charmer had appeared. Everyone expected that Melania would not escape death.

Then, when everyone had written her off, she learned on the seventh day that her uncle was in danger of dying before his catechism was completed. The distress that overtook her upon hearing this news was even worse, if possible than the pain in her body.

Without wasting time, she ordered to be taken to the palace to meet him. Those present were afraid to move her and hesitated, but she clearly told them:

- "If you do not take me to my uncle, my condition will worsen from my sorrow for him."

Then, they had no choice but to comply. They brought a vehicle and lifted her with

difficulty, as she was unable to move her limbs. One of the entourages ran ahead to learn the news. When he reached the palace, he learned from trusted friends that Volosianos, having heard about his niece's condition the day before, was so deeply moved that he decided to proceed with his final integration into the Church.

He called upon the most pious wet nurse of Queen Eudoxia, Lady Eleftheria, and asked her to arrange for his baptism immediately, which she did with great pleasure. Thus, the governor had now embarked on the harbour of life.

When the attendant joyfully returned to announce the event to the procession, Melania, upon hearing it, forgot her pain in her immense joy. With an effort, she stood up and ran towards the palace. The devil, defeated and ashamed, gave up, abandoned his efforts, and left.

Thus, every pain disappeared, and the holy one regained her health. She, who just moments before could not move even with support, now reached the palace unaided, ascended multiple stairs, and entered her uncle's chambers, leaving those who saw her around her astonished by the miracle,

praising the Lord for the defeat of her enemy of salvation.

Melania stayed all night at the bedside of her dying uncle, comforting him by saying:

- *"Truly, you are delighted, my master, for in this present life you have been glorified like few people, and in the future, you progress towards the Redeemer, having been worthy to be spiritually reborn through baptism and to make immortality your possession."*

And after helping him to receive the Holy Mysteries in the morning, she joyfully sent him off on the day of Theophany, sending him to the peace of his Lord of heaven.

All who learned of the events offered thanks and praises to God, who performs great and wondrous acts for the salvation of people. The inspired nun, on every occasion, recounted the profound philanthropy of God with these words:

- *"See how much the All-Good cares for the salvation of a soul. He arranged for my uncle to come here from Rome and for us*

to come from Jerusalem to meet him. It happened that he was ill, and his illness became the occasion for his soul to be redeemed, which had not found a way to encounter grace for so many years."

When the saint also celebrated the fortieth-day memorial of the deceased, and after, in the intervening days, she had benefited many with her words and her example, she decided to return to her place of repentance. Accompanying her, she left for a pilgrimage to the Holy Places; it was the end of February, and the queen, whom the emperor had entrusted to Melania, had greatly benefited from her during her stay in Constantinople.

Sources Chretiennes αρ. 90, σελ. 230 έξ.

18. SAINT MATRONA

Introduction

She was born in Perge of Pamphylia around 420. From a young age, she showed particular diligence in letters and in her pious life. Her parents married her off to a remarkable man, Domitian. From their marriage, a daughter was born. Matrona's new life did not change her. Her desire for Christ grew day by day. When Leo the Thracian was emperor (457-474), Domitian and his wife visited Constantinople. Matrona eagerly devoted herself to visiting churches and monasteries.

Her inclination towards the desert increased. She left her husband and child, disguised herself as a monk, and shut herself in the monastery of Bassianos under the name Babylas. Because her husband was constantly searching for her, she fled to Jerusalem and from there to Beirut. Later, she herself founded a women's monastery and engaged in missionary work. At the end of her life, she returned to Constantinople, where she managed a large monastery. She left this world in deep old age. The Church celebrates her memory on November 9.

Through asceticism and prayer, the Venerable Matrona managed to climb high on the ladder of virtues and was deemed worthy to speak with angels. It was even reported that demons vanished in her presence, leaving the pagan temples empty wherever she passed. Many people visited her and considered it important to hear her opinion. Among them was Sophronia, who, although she worshipped idols, adorned herself with exceptional wisdom and prudence. Sophronia, therefore, once came with a large entourage of women. After staying near the saint for several days and listening to her divinely inspired words, they decided to embrace the faith of Christ and were baptised.

Among them was a virgin, a priestess in a pagan temple, who had heard about Matrona and, leaving behind the sacrifices and the slaughtered animals, ran to become her disciple. When her parents and other acquaintances learned of the priestess's conversion, they rushed to find her and met her in the cell of the saint, watching the guide of souls in her divine visions.

They spoke to her harshly and threatened to set fire and burn everything. Matrona calmly said, *“Let her be; she now belongs to the God of your gods. You have no authority over her.”*

The pagans, uttering threats, turned and left and did not dare disturb the virgin again. The saint entrusted the young priestess to a clergyman, who catechised and baptised her, naming her Euche. She spent the remaining years of her life in Matrona's monastery with the other sisters.

Συμεών του Μεταφραστού, Addenda μην Νοέμβριος. Βίος Οσίας Ματρώνας, ΚΑ΄-ΚΓ΄ / Migne P.G τόμ. 116, στήλ. 940-941.

19. DEACON BENJAMIN

Introduction

For the holy martyr Benjamin, we have no other information apart from what is mentioned in the Ecclesiastical History of Theodoret. He was a fervent Christian and deacon of the martyred Church of Persia during the time of the great king of the Persians, Isdigerd I (399-420), from the Sassanid family. While this king initially

persecuted Christians at the beginning of his reign, he later allowed the Church to grow freely. His relations with Byzantium were good. At that time in Constantinople, the emperors were Arcadius and later Theodosius II.

There was once a hierodeacon named Benjamin who preached the Gospel among the Persians. However, he was captured and imprisoned. Two years later, an official of Byzantium arrived as an ambassador to the king of Persia, and when he learned about Benjamin, he requested his release.

The king agreed, on the condition that the deacon would not attempt to provoke a dispute with the magicians, thus inciting their hostility. The ambassador promised to convince the missionary to cease his struggles, but upon hearing this, Benjamin said,

- *"It is impossible for me not to share the light that the Lord has granted me. Woe to him who hides the talent."*

The king, wanting to satisfy the ambassador, ignored the convict's refusal and freed him. As soon as he left prison, he

resumed preaching, illuminating many souls who wandered in the darkness of ignorance. It wasn't long before the magicians demanded the king to take him back, as he was disrupting their work. The Persian summoned him and insistently asked him to renounce Christ.

Benjamin then posed a strange question to him:

- "What value would you place, my lord, on one who would abandon a kingdom, choosing a worse one?"

The king replied that he considered him worthy of the utmost punishment, and the most learned missionary said,

- "What punishment, then, is fitting for the man who will deny his Creator, deifying and worshipping a being similar to himself?"

The Persian became furious with Benjamin's words and ordered him to be taken to the dungeons and tortured. They stripped him and at first pierced the nails of his feet and hands with reeds. However, as the brave martyr faced the tortures with the smile of hope, they devised to inflict

unbearable pain by driving a sharp reed and a calloused stick into his flesh.

Then the heroic missionary, unyielding and faithful unto death, surrendered his spirit to the director of the games, who awaited to crown him in heaven.

Θεοδωρήτου Κύρου, Εκκλησιαστική
Ιστορία V, ΛΗ' / Migne P.G τόμ. 86, στήλ.
1276.

20. SAINT SYMEON THE STYLITE

Introduction

He was from Asia Minor. An uneducated shepherd loved the solitary life. He stayed for several years in a monastery. Later, he shut himself away for three years in a cell. The fame of his holiness spread quickly. Crowds rushed to him. To be undisturbed, he thought to depart ascending a pillar. Over time, its height grew. In the last twenty years of his life, his pillar reached 16-18 metres. He spent most of the day and night standing or in deep prostrations and always praying.

He interrupted his rule twice a day to engage with the people, both Christian and pagan, who came to see him from all parts of the world. He healed their illnesses, taught, reconciled, and converted the pagans to the Christian faith. In 459, his soul left his troubled body for the heavenly abodes. Our Church commemorates his memory on July 26, but primarily on September 1, which is the date of his burial in Antioch.

Which mortal man's mouth dares to narrate, or which writer can manage to write, or which mind can comprehend and account for the help God sent to the earth with the presence of Saint Symeon? How many thousands of lost sheep turned to Christ upon hearing his teachings, how many thousands of distant and foreign people submitted to the Lord through his miracles, how many thousands of the misled returned from ignorance to knowledge by observing his angelic life!

Even wild individuals came from the depths of the east to see him, to hear his words, to surrender to Christ, and to become servants of the truth. The news of the benefits that the Lord offered through the hands of Symeon spread from one end of creation to the other, and what the prophet says was fulfilled: *"Their voice has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world"* (Psalm 18:5).

Crowds of Christians and Ishmaelites, Persians, Armenians, Iberians, Homerites, and even Spaniards, Britons, Italians, and Gauls gathered at his hermitage. Everyone wanted to touch just the edge of his leather

cloak, believing that by doing so, they would receive a most beneficial blessing.

However, the hermit felt it was not right for him, a mortal and unworthy man, to enjoy such honour. On the other hand, he wanted to find some peace, so he devised the permanent ascent to a column. Its height was initially small, but later he constructed a taller one, thirty-six cubits high. Up there, Symeon felt his soul rising to heaven and distancing itself from earthly things, and the grace of God approaching and supporting him in his challenging endeavour.

Many did not view the hermit's actions favorably, but others pointed out that the Lord would take care to benefit the more sluggish and lethargic through this unprecedented event. Something similar had happened when Isaiah was commanded to walk naked through the streets, and Jeremiah, Hosea, and Ezekiel performed other unusual acts to inspire and encourage faith in those who were indifferent to the calls of preaching and prophecies.

Indeed, seeing a naked person walking in the streets, everyone would be

interested in inquiring about him. Thus, with Symeon, the almost unbelievable spectacle he presented while perched on a tall column attracted countless curious onlookers, who were naturally interested in the reasons that led him to isolate himself in this way.

At that moment, the opportunity arose to proclaim the word of God, which people listened to attentively, trying to understand the case of the stylite. This resulted in many believers, as well as sceptics, being drawn away from the works of iniquity and turning toward the works of faith.

Truly, ascending the column brought the light of truth to many thousands of Ishmaelites who lived in the darkness of irreverence. The stylite resembled a lamp placed high on a lampstand to spread its bright rays everywhere. Daily, numerous groups of non-believers, beneath the pillar, rejected their ancestral deception along with the idols and the orgies of their worship and became partakers of the mystery of salvation through baptism.

And they heard from his mouth the sacred teaching and altered their way of life, adapting it to the demands of the

Gospel. Tens of thousands, who had never felt the existence of a Triune God, learned about their Creator and praised Him with all their heart's strength.

How many unclean souls were sanctified, how many, steeped in fleeting pleasures, became ascetic with just a glance from him! How many rebels against the will of the Lord, when they saw His shining face, His relentless struggles and battles, despised the world and abandoned it, joining the devoted disciples of the truth and becoming vessels of God's grace! How many harlots, when they glimpsed from afar Symeon upon his pillar, cast off the garment of their shame and donned the robe of repentance, seeking refuge in monasteries, where with rivers of tears they persuaded the Lord to tear up the note of their debts.

Such was his influence that one day, when a bishop happened to be there, and Symeon indicated to the newly baptised to receive his blessing, the man was almost killed, as everyone rushed to obey the will of their spiritual father, filled with enthusiasm.

On another occasion, two tribes of locals nearly came to blows, each claiming Symeon's blessing for their leader. They believed so strongly in the power of his blessing that they would accept no compromise and insisted on obtaining unmatched superiority exclusively for themselves until the saint was forced to drive them all away.

Countless are the foreign kings and nobles who received baptism from the holy man, having accepted the faith and confessed Christ. Letters frequently arrived to Symeon from his spiritual children, brought by official envoys and military leaders, with requests for him to bestow his blessing and pray for their kingdom or inquiries for solving complex state problems. These powerful monarchs accepted his observations and suggestions without complaint, always addressing him as father and teacher bestowed upon them by God. They granted him the authority to decide on essential matters, and the saint always advised according to the will of the Lord, making decisions that contributed to the spread of divine glory with the benefit of souls, ensuring to improve the position of the poor and defend them against the oppressions of the rich.

It was paradoxical to see rulers with immense authority over their subjects submitting to the wishes of the ascetic and applying his suggestions without delay, which often contradicted their narrow interests. The king of Persia was among the first to hear about Symeon and showed exceptional interest by sending his people to learn about his life and miracles. In fact, the queen requested that oil be blessed by his hand and kept it alongside her most precious jewels.

All the wise men of the land, learning about the strange stylite, despite all the ironic comments from the magicians, proclaimed that Symeon must have been a wise and prudent teacher. And the people came to meet those who had gone to the saint, believing that they would receive his grace, and they begged to be given some of the blessed oil.

Even the queen of the Ishmaelites, who was childless and wished to have children, sent some officials, pleading with the saint to pray to God for her. In a short time, her desire became a reality, and the heir was born during his time. She then took the

newborn and rushed to the elder to thank him for the blessing.

And since they did not allow her, having just given birth, to approach, she sent the baby, asking the saint to give it his blessing. She even said, "I dedicate the child to you, for it belongs to you. My pleading tears, but more so your prayer, have drawn down the rain of divine grace, and my barren womb has borne fruit."

At another time, the wife of a chieftain of the Saracens, who was also barren and suffered from the contempt of her fellow countrywomen and her husband's mockery, came and sat under the pillar, declaring that she would remain there until her petition was heard. Seeing her faith, the saint said to her: "Go home, and the Lord will take care of you."

She indeed became pregnant and gave birth to a little girl. However, time passed, and the toddler did not start to speak or walk, unlike all her peers. When she turned five years old, they decided to take her to Symeon. They came, therefore, and earnestly pleaded with him. He suggested they wait patiently for the Lord's intervention.

On the seventh day, seeing that nothing was happening, they thought that God did not wish to grant healing and started to leave. They moved away a little and turned to see the stylite for the last time. At that moment, the little girl, upon seeing the bright beacon of the earth, exclaimed, *"Glory be to you, Saint Symeon,"* and began to run joyfully, shouting and singing.

On another occasion, a Persian nobleman, distressed because his only child had been lying paralyzed for fifteen years, sent a message to the holy chorbishop of the local Church, asking him to pray to the Lord for the salvation of his son. He even offered two pieces of precious silk embroidered with golden crosses to leave as a gift for the elder.

When the overseer told Symeon about the child who lay motionless in bed and recounted the plight of the poor father, who had spent his wealth on the remedies of sorcerers without any results, the holy one was deeply saddened and, moved, said:

- "Take these fabrics you brought, folded as they are, and go on your way. When you reach near your city, get down

from your animal, hold the fabrics close to your chest, and proceed silently to the mansion. As soon as you arrive, cover the child with the fabrics and tell it, *'The sinful Symeon commands you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, arise.'*"

The chorbishop retook the gifts and set out. He did precisely as the saint indicated. As soon as he covered the child with the fabrics, it leaped up healed. The affliction that had tormented it retreated before the power of Simeon.

The family of the Persian lord, and first of all the child, who found its health, thanked and glorified God. The chorbishop catechised them, and they quickly became members of the Church. Later, the young man visited the saint seeking his blessing and thanking him for transferring to him the healing grace of God.

At one time, a Saracen chieftain brought a paralysed fellow tribesman to the stylite and asked him to free him from the evil that had befallen him. The saint first asked him to renounce his ancestral irreverence, and after he willingly accepted and fulfilled the command, he

asked him if he believes in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The paralysed man declared that he accepted the faith, and the saint said, *"Your confessions have saved you. Rise, take your mat, and go."* The healed man actually stood up, took a few steps, and then, excited, lifted the chief onto his shoulders and they departed glorifying God. Symeon had imitated Christ on this occasion, who commanded the paralysed man to carry his mat.

Once again, the Lord's word was applied: "He who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also, and greater works than these he will do" (John 14:12). This promise was fulfilled, as is well known, above and beyond. Indeed, the Lord performed all these miracles through His servants, enriched with His grace.

On another occasion, a newly baptised Ishmaelite, one of the tribe's officials, vowed before the saint not to consume animal food anymore. However, later, his persistence waned, and he slaughtered a chicken and sat down to eat it.

But because God willed to encourage him to keep his promise and honour His servant, who was a witness to the Ishmaelite's vow, the chicken's flesh was turned into stone so that it could not be eaten. Astonished, the man ran to Symeon and confessed his sin, seeking forgiveness and his help to be freed from the bonds of his guilt.

The stylite not infrequently found the opportunity to serve the faithful with the foretelling of impending calamities, as his prophetic gift informed him. He had foreseen the drought and the terrible famine that followed, accompanied by a plague that struck the regions of Palestine at that time, even indicating the signs of its approach.

On another occasion, he predicted an invasion of locusts and reassured the farmers that the extent of the destruction would not be great, as God's charity would not allow the evil to flourish. Indeed, after thirty days, clouds of insects passed through the area without harming the orchards.

At another time, he warned a friend of his fifteen days in advance about a

conspiracy being prepared against him, which helped him confront it without negative consequences.

The half-mad devil, enraged by the presence of the holy man among the people, set out to torment him and force him to withdraw from the struggle. Thus, he inflicted a terrible wound on the foot of the saint, like those of Job, causing excruciating pain, so that the elder could not use that limb at all.

The incurable wound gradually became infested with worms that gnawed at his flesh, and there was no way to heal it. In fact, if ever one of the insects fell to the ground, the saint, understanding the value of this trial, would ask for it to be brought back to him and would place it again in the wound, saying, *"Eat from the food that the Lord has given you."*

While the saint's foot was in this condition, it pleased God to have a Saracen chieftain come to visit him, seeking his blessing. The saint stood under the pillar and listened to the elder's teachings when, at one moment, a worm fell beside him.

The chieftain, without suspecting the reality and thinking that it was some personal object of the saint, bent down, picked it up, touched it to his eyes and heart, and continued to hold it as something precious.

Symeon asked him to give it to him, and since the Saracen refused to part with it, considering it a blessing, Symeon revealed to him that it was a disgusting worm. Then the chieftain opened his palm, and a shining pearl appeared inside.

The saint, astonished by what he saw, said to him, *"Keep it for a blessing; may it give the grace of God to you and your descendants, as it has become as you believed."* The chieftain, overjoyed, left, taking the blessing from the saint's wound.

There was a governor of a city in Palestine who was an idolater. He was hunchbacked and had no neck, so his head was permanently resting on his chest, and he could not turn it. His friends, who had heard of the miracles of Symeon, carried him under the pillar and asked to pray for him.

The hunchback recounted how it was impossible for him to be healed, even though he spent large sums on magical spells, and he ended by expressing his certainty that he would leave the saint's hermitage healthy. Then, he pleaded non-stop so the elder could not pray to the Lord on his behalf. The pagan insisted that Symeon place his hand on his head, believing that the saint had his own power.

However, Symeon told him, "I am a sinful, insignificant, and worthless man. My hand has nothing special. Only if God wills it will your desire be fulfilled, for He alone has the power to work miracles. No man can heal another except by the will of God. Surrender to the omnipotence of the living God, the creator and ruler of the world, and you will be benefitted."

Then the unfortunate man stopped his pleas and allowed the saint to pray. At that moment, he managed to lean against the stone on which Symeon stood, believing that this was how the power of prayer was being directed to him.

The miracle happened as soon as the elder finished his dialogue with heaven. The withered man stood up straight, stood

tall, and jumped up joyfully, bouncing like a child. Everyone, but mainly he, glorified God for the new miracle. The healed man then opened the boxes he had brought and generously offered the ascetic precious gold and silver.

Symeon looked at the gifts with disdain and said, "If you want to please me, stay here to receive the light of truth and be baptised to obtain forgiveness, and also free all your slaves, so that their liberation may be the ransom that will free your own soul from the yoke of Satan."

The healed man obeyed the saint, and later, peaceful and blessed, he departed for his city, praising God and glorifying the holy servant who healed him and simultaneously set him free.

On another occasion, a wealthy man from Saba came. He suffered from an extremely painful headache. He felt as if his mind was being pierced every moment, and the only relief he felt was when he struck his head against the beams of the walls of his house. He prepared for the long journey and set off when he heard about the wonderworking hermit.

Water From the Desert

His caravan could have been lost in the endless desert, fallen prey to robbers, or in the clutches of the lions that filled the area, but God, seeing his faith, sent a guardian angel who led him to the elder's hermitage. As they drew near, the pain lessened. On the contrary, their supplies for the journey remained untouched miraculously for almost a year, as long as the journey lasted, although they were, of course, sustained from them.

When they finally arrived at the pillar, the holy man heard all the events and requested water from the spring, thanking the Lord for His gifts. He prayed, blessed it, and made the sick man drink it in the name of Christ, sprinkling it on his head. Nothing else was needed. The remnants of pain also disappeared, and the man felt his whole body light and free. He thanked and glorified God, received baptism, became a Christian, and left proclaiming the greatness of the Lord back to his distant homeland.

A group of four lepers and three demoniacs made a similar long journey. They started from the depths of the East and took thirteen months to reach the holy man. Under the pillar, they recounted their

hardships until they were found worthy of being in this position, adding that despite the great distance, they never lost the way, nor did they lack food and water.

When Symeon heard them, he said, *"The God who showed you the way to come here will also grant you the health you so desire."* He requested water, blessed it, and gave it to them to drink and sprinkle in the Lord's name. As soon as they did so, their pains vanished, their wounds were cleansed, and they were freed from the bonds that held them. They thanked and glorified God and, of course, renounced the worship of idols, were baptised, and became Christians.

Another time, numerous representatives of the inhabitants of the Lebanon mountain range arrived at the Stylite. They reported that wild beasts had appeared in their region, indiscriminately devouring humans and livestock wherever they found them. Many times they entered homes and grabbed children and infants, snatching them from their mothers' arms, who were unable to help and watched helplessly as the beasts devoured their offspring, frozen in terror. Sorrow had spread everywhere, and mourning rose to the heavens.

Everyone lived barricaded in their homes, and when they dared to venture out, they gathered in groups, well-armed.

When the saint heard their words, he sternly said, "Why does it seem strange to you that you suffer according to your deeds? Your ancestors abandoned the true God, the one who with the overflow of his love created mankind, the one who with boundless philanthropy sustains the universe, and you sought refuge in mute idols. And you persist in delusion and deceit. The Lord allowed the beasts to torment you to awaken repentance within you and to urge you to return to Him. If you do not intend to repent, then you should not have come here, but rather go and seek help from the idols you worship."

The rugged villagers then fell to their knees and fervently begged Symeon to intercede for them before God and lead them to salvation. With them were also bound those who happened to be there, heard their sufferings, and felt compassion for them.

The holy one understood that the hardness of their hearts had softened, and they were now ready to enter the Church.

After all, the blow they had received was heavy, and it was natural for everyone to feel pity for them. The thought of a mother seeing her child being torn apart and its members scattered here and there, becoming food for wild beasts, cannot leave anyone unmoved.

Therefore, the compassionate servant of love turned to them and said, "Once you cast out the delusion that has enveloped you and give the promise that you will return to the true God and be baptised in the name of Christ, then I will also pray to the Lord to show you the greatness of His philanthropy."

With one voice, the idolaters gave their promise. They declared that upon returning to their homeland, they would immediately demolish the idols' sanctuaries and deliver the images and other magical tools to the fire.

The saint, noticing their complete conversion, gave them a small box with blessed dust and said, "Go in the ways of peace. Once you reach your region, return to all the villages and at the entrance of each one, bury four stones in the ground and form three crosses with this dust on each one. If there are Christian priests up

there, call them to help you and to perform night services. Then God will perform the miracle, and no human life will be lost to the beasts anymore."

Indeed, upon returning to their homeland, they realised that since the moment Symeon had prayed for them, all the beasts had departed from the villages and withdrawn into the forests. The people, excited, set off together with their children, and the elders close behind, and they went down to the saint's pillar to give thanks and be baptised. They even recounted how the miracle happened and how the beasts were exterminated.

When they made the stones and dust, as the holy one had instructed, and performed the rituals, they saw the beasts rushing and coming around the rocks, howling atrociously. Many fell on the spot and died. Others ran away in a panic, and their roar sounded like a woman's voice saying, *"Alas, what have you done to us, Symeon!"*

For ten days, the extermination continued until, even if you searched, you would not find any of them alive. From the dead beasts, they took the skins and saw that they did not resemble bears or

panthers at all but were different and exotic. They brought three skins with them and hung them under the pillar. After describing the miracle, they all proceeded to baptism and became Christians.

They stayed with their spiritual father for a week, listening to the preaching of the truth from his mouth, and then they left happy for their villages, glorifying God. They often returned to bring their newborn children for the saint to baptise them. The wound of the beasts had ended up serving the interest of their soul.

During a visit to the stylite, Antiochus, the governor of Damascus, recounted what he heard from the chief of the Arabs, Naman, at a meal he hosted when the relations between the Byzantines and his people were peaceful.

Naman had asked Antiochus: *"Is that famous Symeon a god?"* After receiving the answer that *he was merely a pious servant of God*, he said:

- "Once, some time ago, the people of my tribe learned about him and began to visit him. Many returned as Christians while others did not return at all. The

officials were alarmed by this and asked me to prohibit travel to the place of the stylite, fearing that gradually all our kin would become Christians and desert our camps to come to you. I then gathered the tribe and gave a strict order that whoever went to Symeon should expect mercy, neither for themselves nor for their family. All of them would fall by my sword.

“While sleeping in my tent that night, I saw a radiant man enter, accompanied by five others who seemed to be his followers. I had never seen him before, and I was terrified. I trembled all over, my knees gave way, I fell, and worshipped him.”

“I then heard him say to me: *‘Who are you that hinders the people of God from coming close to His servant?’*”

“Immediately, his attendants seized me and beat me until he took pity on me and ordered them to let me go. He drew his sword and threatened me: *‘If you dare to prevent even one person from going to Symeon again, you will not escape my sword.’*”

“I stood up, drenched in sweat, and early in the morning I called my men again

and permitted them to go with their families to Symeon whenever they wanted, and if they wished to become Christians, without the slightest fear."

"I, too, would like to meet this great man and hear his teachings, but I fear I will face serious trouble with the king of Persia, who would consider it an insult and betrayal. Nevertheless, in the camps of my tribe, Christian churches have been built, where priests serve, and there is also a Bishop who baptises freely anyone who decides to follow your faith."

Those who happened to be there and heard the story of Antiochus were amazed and glorified the Lord for the grace He gives to His chosen servants.

This was not the only case where the intervention of Saint Symeon saved the faithful from persecution. When the king of Persia had permitted the chief of the magi of his country to fight against the Christians, striking them by every means, this vile creature, an instrument of Satan, greatly tormented the flock of Christ, ignoring, of course, that God's judgment would not leave him unpunished.

He therefore arrested and imprisoned three hundred and fifty of the most fervent believers, planning to keep them locked within four walls without water and bread until they died. The prisoners prayed incessantly, calling upon their intercessor, Geronda Symeon, begging him to intervene so that the idolaters would finally understand that the God of Christians does not abandon them to the mercy of the enemies of their faith.

On the tenth night of their imprisonment, a miracle occurred. They saw their ambassador, clad in a dazzling white robe and shining like a torch, among them atop his pillar.

He said to them, "Peace be upon you, brothers. You sought my intercession. Behold, the Lord has instructed me to convey to you a message of patience and strength. Your struggle is over. The crown of victory awaits you in the heavens. You have only two days remaining; on the third, you will be freed and enjoy unprecedented honour and glory. The persecution of God's people will cease, and he who initiated it will today receive a relentless blow that will humble him and magnify the name of the Lord throughout the East."

The courage that these tormented individuals derived from Symeon's appearance is indescribable. They felt they were no longer prisoners, and filled with hope, they sang and praised God. At the same time, the leader of the persecutors faced a furious figure, terrifying in appearance, standing atop a fiery pillar surrounded by blinding lightning. He was frightened, shaken, and fell to the ground as if dead.

The voice sounded terrifying: "Wretched and foul beast, poisonous viper, do you think you will be allowed to tyrannize the flock of the Church for long? You fight against God Almighty, having a worthless proxy from your mortal king, and you imagined that you would torment His children unpunished, without Him entering the battle? Did the thought cross your mind that you would push the faithful to deny the Truth and not pay for it? The justice of the Lord is coming upon you, and who will save you now from His righteous wrath?"

Just as lightning and thunder follow each other relentlessly during a storm, a bolt strikes the arrogant persecutor on the

head, scorching his body such that an unbearable stench spreads around.

Symeon commanded sternly: "Send immediately to the king the documents you received to begin the persecution and tell him that Symeon the Stylite warns him that if he does not immediately order the release of all the imprisoned Christians and stop the persecution of the Church of Christ, severe vengeance will fall upon him."

Then the saint vanished, and the sorcerer remained fallen on the ground, mourning his fate. Many gathered at his cries, asking him what had happened to him. Through his lamentations, he murmured that Symeon, defending his spiritual children, burned him with the fire he had worshipped for so many years, and even threatened him that if he did not take care to stop the persecution, he would suffer more.

Once he regained his composure, he informed the king of the events, describing the bitter punishment he had received, and advising him to leave the Christians alone so that neither of them would suffer worse.

The king promptly ordered that all persecution cease and that the prisoners be released and allowed to worship their God without interference. He sent written prohibitions to all his officials, instructing that no one speak or act against the Christians. He ordered that their churches be opened and that they conduct their worship as they did before the persecution without fear.

Those Church leaders who were far away were astonished upon learning of this unexpected change in the king's attitude towards the faith. Only when the freed prisoners arrived in the communities of the faithful and recounted Saint Symeon's appearance did they understand what had transpired.

They then sent three elders to convey a thank-you letter to the saint and to express the gratitude of the Persian Church for, through his intervention, they were saved from certain destruction.

The old magician lived for another ten torturous days, half-burned and eaten by worms, and his ordeal made many of his

compatriots realise their delusion and seek refuge in the Church.

Many other wondrous works also testify to Symeon's actions. Whoever tries to enumerate them resembles someone struggling to measure the ocean's depth.

The texts have been gathered from his two Greek lives and a Syrian one. Specifically:

1. Θεοδώρητου Κύρου, *Φιλόθεος Ιστορία*, / Migne P.G. τόμ. 82, στήλ. 1476 εξ.
 2. Αντωνίου, *Βίος Οσίου Συμεώνος* 17-18 και 22 / Lietzmann, Hans, *Das Leben des Heiligen Symeon Stylites* (Texte und Untersuchungen σειρά 3η τόμ. 2ος τεύχος 3ον, Leipzig 1908, σελ. 42 εξ. και 56,
 3. *Συριακός βίος* 54 εξ. 64, 66 εξ. 96, 97 και 101 εξ. / Lietzmann, αυτόθι σελ. 106 εξ., 112 εξ., 114, 116, 140 εξ. και 146 εξ.
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21. SAINT EUTHYMIOS THE GREAT

Introduction

He was born in Armenia in 377 and died in Palestine in 473. At the age of 18, he pondered over Jerusalem. He lived a life of

great asceticism in the caves between the holy city and the Dead Sea. When he was ordained as a presbyter, he was 28 years old. He founded many monastic centres. The most important were a coenobium, which he entrusted to the monk Theoktistos, and a famous lavra. He was admired for his holy life and the miracles he continued to perform even after his death. He gathered around him a large number of monks. His memory is celebrated on January 20.

The story of the elder Terevon, as told by his namesake grandson, the well-known chieftain of the Saracens, sheds light on Saint Euthymios' missionary activity among the Arabs.

Terevon, when he was a child, was afflicted by the influence of some demon and became paralysed on the entire right side of his body.

At the same time, the chieftain and his companions had become subjects of the Byzantines, having been forced to leave Persia, where they lived, due to a persecution of Christians in that country. Aspebetos, although a pagan, refused to

implement the inhumane measures imposed by the authorities. Thus, he lost the king's favour and, fearing the worst, took his paralysed child and his faction and sought refuge with General Anatolios, the commander of the neighbouring province of the Byzantine state, who made him the leader of the Saracens in the area.

There, where they settled in Arabia, the paralysed Terevon had a strange dream, which he immediately recounted to his father. Aspebetos hurried to fulfil what the dream suggested. With a large retinue, he set out. He came, bringing his paralysed child to the place of the indication, precisely where Euthymios and Theoktistos had lived in asceticism with their companions.

Seeing the multitude of Arabs, the monks were frightened, but Theoktistos stepped forward and bravely asked what the newcomers sought. They replied that they were looking for Euthymios, the messenger of God. The monk informed them that the ascetic had decided to rest for a few days and could not meet anyone. Aspebetos imploringly grabbed the monk's hand and, with a pleading look, showed him his child. Terevon then recounted all

that he had suffered and his ordeal while seeking a cure from doctors and sorcerers.

And how, afterwards, when they arrived in their new homeland one day, he was reflecting on the futility of his efforts until then to be healed and the inability of the cunning pagans to help him, and he concluded that if God does not will it, none of the remedies is beneficial.

With these thoughts, he addressed God, beseeching Him with tears: *"Almighty Lord, who created heaven and earth with all their embellishments, if You free me from this painful passion, I will immediately become a Christian, abandoning the worship of idols."*

He finally recounted that as these thoughts passed through his mind, he fell asleep and dreamed of an elderly monk with a long beard who asked him what the pain was. After he described his illness to him, he said that if he fulfilled the promise he made to God, he would be healed. Terevon replied that he would fulfil the vow as soon as he was freed from the illness.

Then the elder said to him, *"I am the monk Euthymios, and I am in the hermitage of the eastern desert of Jerusalem, near the river. Come immediately to find me, and I will pray for God to heal you."*

He then got up, woke his father, and told him about the dream. Together, they decided to hurry quickly, leaving every other concern aside, to meet Euthymius. The paralytic concluded with these words: *"I beg you, do not stand in the way of my meeting with the doctor whom God has shown me."*

Theoktistos conveyed to the elder, who was always shut up in his cell, what had happened in the courtyard. As soon as Euthymios heard it, he thought that he had no right, for the sake of his own tranquillity, to oppose God's plans.

He then went down to the courtyard, approached the strangers, knelt among them, and fervently prayed for Terevon's health. After a while, he got up and made the sign of the cross over the paralytic, and the miracle was completed. The young man regained his lost strength, his limbs became upright, and he walked.

His companions, astonished by this instantaneous action, this incomprehensible intervention of God, believed in Christ and fell to the ground, begging to be baptised. Euthymios, who had been deemed worthy to be the bearer of God's grace, understood that they had sincerely believed and commanded that a small baptismal font be prepared in a corner of his cave. After catechising them all together in the Christian faith, he baptised them, making them members of the Church.

He renamed Aspebetos, who he baptised first, as Peter. The second to be baptised was Maris, an equally important family member, the brother-in-law of the first, known for his prudence and wealth. Then Terevon was illuminated, and the others followed. The newly baptised remained in the monastery for forty days, and the holy elder cared to enlighten their spirits with the light of Truth and strengthen them in faith.

They left, no longer as they came, descendants of Hagar and the barren Ishmael but of Sarah. After being transformed into heirs of God's promise

and changed, through baptism, from slaves to free, Maris even preferred to stay in the monastery and follow the monastic life, leaving the world behind. He dedicated all his great wealth to the building and expansion of the monastery and, over the years, distinguished himself for his holiness and devotion to the Lord.

This remarkable miracle, performed by Euthymios' hands, quickly became known in the area. Pilgrims and the sick began to flock to the hermitage, all finding health. Thus, the saint's reputation spread throughout Palestine and the surrounding countries.

Among those who were redeemed thanks to Euthymios was the generation of the Ziphaians who had previously embraced the heresy of Mani [i.e. Manichaeism] and now, while attending Euthymios' preaching, abandoned the heretic and, now enlightened, joined the Orthodox Church.

Later, the saint wished to regain some quiet and departed to a small cave, a little higher than the monastery, along with his disciple, Domitian. They would only descend on Sundays for the common

liturgical gathering of the brothers. However, it was not God's will for the elder to leave the enlightenment of the Saracens.

Peter, the former Aspebetos, arrived one day at the monastery seeking Euthymios. He had brought many men and women of his kind who sought to listen to the saint and become Christians. Despite his desire for peace, the man of God ran down to the monastery as soon as he heard about them to catechise them. After baptising them, they stayed with him for a week, listening to the sacred words.

Then, the newly baptised wanted to ascend to his cave, and there, their leader, Peter, ordered them to dig a well in the little garden, build an oven and three cells, and build a chapel to show their gratitude to the holy elder.

Indeed, how strange! These once wild wolves of Arabia had become sheep of Christ today and were begging the hermit to allow them to build their own accommodations around his cave. However, the generous Euthymios pointed out to them, since they wanted to live near him, an area a short distance from his hermitage on the road to the monastery.

Thus, he could have the desired solitude, and their wish to live by his side would be fulfilled.

The newly baptised accepted, and the first task was the foundation of their church by their spiritual father, who afterwards instructed them to pitch their tents around. The saint often descended to the new village of his regenerated children and ensured priests were ordained.

Meanwhile, the first students learned about the installation, those who had come with Terevon, and rushed to go as well, bringing along other unbaptised individuals whom the saint guided upon entering the Church.

Little by little, the village grew, and since the area was small, the newcomers created new communities further away, so over time, the region was filled with small villages — “interventions.”

Then, Euthymios approached the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Juvenal, asking him to ordain a bishop for the needs of the new flock. The Patriarch understood the need and established the Diocese of Interventions, ordaining Peter as its first

hierarchy, who had indeed become a spiritual shepherd of his contemporaries.

And the matter did not stop there. Crowds of Saracens continuously arrived, were baptised by Euthymios and Peter, and settled in the Interventions, worshipping the true God.

After his repose, the saint did not cease to guide the Saracens to the harbour of the Church. While he was still living in the world, alongside his care for the monastery, he also restored two wells that had existed in the area for a long time. Indeed, he granted one to the newly baptised who settled there. He tended to the other and left it for the monastery's needs, having built an iron door and locks to protect it.

Over time, the wells became useless again, but during a year of great drought, the monks were forced to reuse their own without ceasing to secure it, as Euthymios had indicated. The water scarcity had also created serious problems for the Saracens, who began to quarrel among themselves,

often recklessly leading to destruction and looting.

One day, three descendants of Peter and Terevon appeared at the monastery carrying a wildly demon-possessed person of their kind. They explained to the fathers that they had just gone to the monastery's well to water their camels and found it locked, so their friend grabbed a large stone and broke the door lock. At that moment, however, the demon struck him, threw him down, and tore him apart.

A passerby advised them to hurry to the monastery and beseech the saint, reminding them that Euthymios, the eternal protector of their monastery, would not allow anyone to wrong it without punishment.

As soon as the monks heard about the incident, they took the demon-possessed individual, who they later learned was a newcomer to the Intercessions and had not yet been baptised, to the cemetery and placed him on the saint's coffin. Immediately, the holy one of God performed a miracle, cleansing the man of the demon's influence and simultaneously enlightening his mind so that very soon,

after being instructed, he was baptised and entered the harbour of the Church.

Schwartz, Eduard, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis* (Texte und Untersuchungen, τόμ. 49, τεύχος 2), Leipzig 1939, σελ. 18-25 και 75.

22. SAINT THALLELAIOS

Introduction

Theodoret of Cyrus' *Philotheos History* provides information about the life of the hermit Thallelaios. He hailed from Cilicia and lived during the first half of the 5th century. He practised asceticism in Syria. When Theodoritos encountered him, he had lived for ten years in a small hut supported by two wheels. Due to the purpose of asceticism, he made it small, one cubit wide and two cubits high, so that the large-bodied Thallelaios could fit inside, sitting down with his head on his knees. In this position, he would say his prayers. God, hearing his prayers and seeing his holy life, bestowed the gift of performing miracles upon him.

A short distance from the beautiful town of Gavalas was a hill, at the top of which an idol-worshipping temple operated. Since ancient times, the area's inhabitants have worshipped their false gods there with sacrifices and honours, trying to appease them to avoid their cruelty.

The priests exploited the superstitions of the simple-minded and pretended that with various charms, they could heal the illnesses of humans and animals. Thus, those who learned of it would come from afar to seek their health. The healings, of course, were carried out with the help of demons, to whom the unfortunate peasants surrendered themselves.

The holy Thallelaios, wanting to confront this wretched situation, set up his hut and settled on the hill next to the temple. When the priests noticed him, they attempted to scare him by displaying their accomplishments.

However, they failed because the grace of God was guarding him, and the shield of faith protected the hermit. Their failure filled them with hatred and vengeful frenzy, and as they found nothing else to unleash their wrath upon, they fell upon

the trees, cutting down the fig trees and the flourishing olive trees that covered the hill, more than five hundred of them.

The villagers, astonished and frightened, could not react, but this incident made them understand the deception that was being done against them. Those who had previously been covered by the darkness of delusion were now enlightened by the teaching and miraculous works of Thalleleus, illuminated by the light of divine knowledge.

Through his prayers, the saint succeeded in healing the sick who came to him, not only humans but also their necessary companions in the desert, the camels. Thus, gradually, that country's entire population abandoned their ancestors' superstition and embraced the true faith. Then, Thalleleus, aided by his spiritual children, demolished the temple of demons and rebuilt a large church in the name of the Martyrs, opposing the false gods with the victors over death.

Θεοδώρητου Κύρου, *Φιλόθεος Ιστορία*,
KH' / Migne P.G. τόμ. 82, στήλη 1488 εξ.

23. SAINT SABBAS THE SANCTIFIED

Introduction

He was born in 439 in Cappadocia. He came to Jerusalem at 17 and was connected with Saint Euthymios. He was sent to the monastery of Abbot Theoktistos, where he stayed for 13 years. He later became a hermit. In 478, he began to receive disciples and built a prominent and renowned Lavra. In 490, he became the head of all the monasteries in Palestine. Soon, the sacred institutions began to multiply. He fought against the Origenists and the Monophysites and emerged as a champion of Orthodoxy. When, in 531, the Christians of Palestine were attacked by the Samaritans, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Peter, sent Sabbas to Constantinople, where he succeeded in obtaining from the emperor a suspension of taxes for two years. At 93 years old (532), sanctified and glorious, he fell asleep in the Lord.

Once, Saint Sabbas met four starving and miserable Saracens by chance. He had compassion for them and invited them to eat with him. He opened his satchel, took out the few herbs and boiled roots he had, and offered them to them. They ate and were filled, and during the conversation,

they asked him and learned in which of the caves in the area he lived.

A few days later, they managed to secure some bread, cheese, and dates and ran to bring them to the hermit's cave. The elder admired the grateful disposition of these rude people, fell into deep thought, and wept as he monologued:

- *"Alas, my soul, how quickly these barbarians rushed to repay the insignificant offering of a few herbs. Where is your gratitude for the Lord's gifts?"*

Once again, four Saracen bandits were trying to reach the saint's cave to steal whatever they could find, but they could not find the path. Sabbas noticed them and threw a rope down to help them climb the rocks. The bandits, astonished, climbed up and, of course, found nothing to steal. They left admiring his poverty but even more his innocence. From then on, they often came to meet him and brought him whatever they could find, including bread, cheese, and dates.

* * *

Later, Saint Sabbas abandoned his hermitic life and established a monastery in Palestine. But even from there, he continued to build up both believers and unbelievers with his virtue. Higher than his monastery, on the peak of the mountain, there was a tower built since the time of Empress Eudocia.

Some heretical monks lived there, followers of Dioscorus and Eutyches, who were recently succeeded by two monks, champions of Nestorius' cursed heresy. They do not admit that the Virgin Mary is truly Theotokos and essentially support the idea that the Lord Jesus Christ is not true God, the one person of the holy and consubstantial Trinity.

Thus, the great spiritual leader of the monks felt deeply troubled that these heretics gathered so close to his dwelling and pleaded with God to help him uproot the scourge of heresy from the area.

One day, he saw in a vision that all the monks of the place were gathered for a resurrection assembly, and the guards of the church were throwing out the two heretical neighbours, shouting that they were Jews, as they did not accept the most

important doctrines. He himself pleaded with the guards to allow them to commune with the Orthodox, but his plea fell on deaf ears.

From the moment he saw the vision, Sabbas felt an irresistible sympathy for those unfortunate ones who had been led astray into error, and he decided to help them. Night and day, he prayed to God to bring them to an awareness of their mistake and to show them the right path again.

At the same time, he would go up to the tower, meet them, and converse with them, trying to soften their hardness and lead them to true piety within the embrace of the Church. Gradually, through prayers and admonitions, the elder managed to persuade them to renounce Nestorius' ideas and, with God's help, rejoin the ark of salvation.

* * *

Years passed peacefully, but later, the Samaritans living in Palestine attacked the Christians, causing immense destruction. They plundered and burned temples, tortured and killed anyone who crossed

their path, and set entire villages ablaze, mainly around Neapolis. When they prevailed, they proclaimed as their king a certain Julian, one of their patriots, while continuing their vandalism.

They slaughtered the Bishop of Neapolis, Mammon, and butchered some clergymen they managed to capture, throwing their bodies into the fire along with the relics of holy martyrs that were kept in the churches. The terror among the Christian population was such that no one dared to venture out of their homes.

When all this became known in the capital, the most pious Emperor Justinian commanded the glorious generals Theodore and John to organise a campaign against the rebels. In the battle that ensued, Julian was killed along with a large number of Samaritans.

During those chaotic hours, Silouan, who had come from the enemy camp as an ambassador for peace, was handed over to the flames by the outraged crowd of Neapolis, and Saint Sabbas had foretold at an unsuspecting time the manner of his death.

Silouan's son, Arsenius, who was an official and was in Constantinople at that time, used his influential acquaintances and presented himself at the palace, asking the emperor to punish the people of Palestine for the killing of the ambassador. He truly persuaded Justinian to take harsh measures affecting the innocent Christian population.

Then, the Archbishop of Palestine, Peter, and the other archbishops begged the elder Sabbas to go to the capital and plead with the king to pardon the taxes imposed as punishment, detailing the destruction caused by the Samaritans.

The elder succumbed to the pleas of the archpriests, left his solitude, and travelled to Constantinople in April for the good of the people. The emperor received him honourably, listened to what he had to say, and gave new orders regarding the matter, completely convinced by the ascetic's words.

And where he had previously pursued the faithful of the Church of Palestine with his commands, he now turned against the real culprits of the tragedy, who were none other than the Samaritans. He prohibited

their synagogues, rendered them exiles from all the state's cities, and deprived them of the right to inherit and accept donations. He even sentenced the instigators of the rebellion and those who still insisted on disobedience to the state to death.

Arsenios, who was among the condemned, disappeared, but a few days later, he sought refuge with the blessed Sabbas, who had not yet left the capital. After expressing his repentance with tears, he asked to become a Christian. Sabbas taught him, and when he returned to Palestine, all the repentant compatriots who desired it were catechised and baptised in the name of the Lord.

His death did not limit the fame of Saint Sabbas's miracles. Christians and unbelievers often sought his help and were never left unsatisfied. At this time, the monastery steward was carrying the wheat bought from Egypt into storage, destined for the needs of the brotherhood. The transport was done with hired camels and local camel drivers.

One day, as the caravan was climbing the last uphill stretch outside the

monastery's guesthouse, one of the loaded camels slipped and fell into the deep ditch by the road, rolling towards the bed of the stream below. The frightened camel driver, in his confusion, called out to the saint, shouting: "*Elder Sabba, you alone can save my camel. Help me.*"

Then he saw a shining monk sitting and holding the camel steady on its back. He ran and descended from the path to the stream. When he arrived, he saw the camel unharmed, waiting loaded with wheat, but the monk was nowhere to be found.

He understood. He took the animal, they ascended to the monastery, and he unloaded the wheat. However, from that day on, the poor Saracen, captivated by the miracle, would go to the church every year on that day to venerate the saint's relic. He also never failed to visit the steward to give him a respectable portion of his earnings for the year for the monastery as an expression of gratitude for the benefit he received!

Schwartz, Eduard, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*
(Texte und Untersuchungen, τόμ. 49,

τεύχος 2), Leipzig 1939, σελ. 96,98 εξ.,
127 εξ., 172 εξ. και 186 εξ.

24. SAINT SYMEON OF THE WONDROUS MOUNTAIN

Introduction

His holy mother Martha gave birth to him in 521 in Antioch. At just six years old,

he ascended a small pillar next to the elder John. At twelve, he climbed a 12-meter pillar. At this age, he was ordained as a deacon. To find peace from the turmoil of the world, which came from all places to greet him, he withdrew to a mountain called the Wondrous Mountain. There, he lived as a hermit on a rock for about 10 years. After that, he continued his ascetic practice, again on a pillar. At the age of 33, he was ordained as a presbyter.

Around the last pillar, his students founded a monastery. The wave of pilgrims continued to grow. Not only Christians came, but many pagan Arabs as well. A large number of them came to know Christ through him. The saint's miracles, teachings, and prayers brought rest to bodies and souls. He passed away to our Lord in 592. Even after his death, his beneficial influence continued.

The monastery that Symeon established on the Wondrous Mountain flourished and benefited people, even though the devil, the constant enemy of every good, sought to create scandals among the brothers, to plant hostile feelings in the hearts of the inhabitants of the surrounding areas, and

to incite the leaders of the neighbouring villages to claim the monastery's pastures, aiming to destroy the constructive work for souls that the brotherhood was carrying out.

Fortunately, the cause of destruction could not achieve his purpose. He was constantly tormented in vain, coming out defeated and ashamed because, thanks to the prayers of the righteous servant of God, instead of winning in his camp from the faithful, he was daily losing those who believed and were saved by joining the ranks of the Church. With the saint's teaching, who illuminated their minds with the ineffable light of Christ, crowds of idolaters, Greeks and foreigners became faithful, and heretics returned to the Lord as the word of truth illuminated their souls.

But even the many, whose worldly cares hardened their hearts and made them forget that they were members of the Church, now remembered again the struggle for their salvation. In the end, even the rivalries among the monks were overcome, and they once again became serene and peaceful. The leaders of the surrounding lands ceased their disputes with the monastery and sought ways to

show their love and respect for Symeon. Thus, the devil was defeated, and a vast brotherhood was established in the area.

* * *

Once, they brought to Symeon a large man from Antioch, who was tormented by a serious illness, likely hemiplegia, and they laid him before him. This man was an idolater. The saint, illuminated by divine grace, said to him:

- "If you want to get well, you must ask for the mercy of the only-begotten Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, and of His Most Holy Mother, and curse Venus and all the false gods that have kept you away from the one true God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Only then will you be heard."

The sick man, although pitiable, did not wish to follow the saint's advice and persisted in his delusion, not daring to curse the idols or detach his heart from their worship. For three whole days, he watched many crippled people come with faith and leave healed by Symeon, and only then did he feel his weakness, set aside his pride, and cried bitterly:

- *"Christ, God, whom Symeon proclaims so fervently, You who deigned to borrow human flesh from the Virgin Mary and become man for our sake, come and help me, listening to the prayers of Your servant."*

At that moment, he cursed Venus and the worship of idols and those who persist in them. The saint, seeing his repentance, immediately asked for water to be brought to him. After washing his hands with it, he ordered that the sick man be anointed. It took no more than that. The enormous, bedridden man got up and used his limbs easily as if he had never been paralysed. He thanked and left, glorifying God.

In Apatē, near Antioch, some Isaurian stonecutters had their workshop, cutting stone for the city wall. One day, three or four craftsmen went down to the nearby forest to gather wood for their fire. However, one foolish man went to lift a huge load and got stuck; he couldn't move a step and fell down dead.

As he was an idolater, his companions feared that a demon had overtaken him. They then grabbed him onto a makeshift

stretcher and carried him to Saint Symeon. As he always did, the elder made the sign of the cross over the bedridden man. However, the paralysed man did not move at all.

Bitterly, Symeon asked him, *"My man, it seems that you follow the delusion of idols, thus provoking the true God, who will wait for your repentance before making you well."*

The young man was ashamed to confess the truth and assured that nothing of the sort was happening. The saint certainly understood the lie, but he could not do anything unless the sick man himself came to awareness and repented sincerely, thus attracting the healing grace of God. He only said to him, *"Since you keep your heart hermetically sealed from the love of God, you have nothing but to leave and return to your homeland. However, the Lord will not abandon you and will give you the opportunity to be saved."*

Then, his companions took him and transported him to his place. Since they naturally had no desire to deal with him, they set him down in the corner of the large pilgrimage site in the area and

entrusted his unmarried sister to take care of him and beg for alms from the pilgrims to secure the necessities for both.

He lived this way for three whole years until his heart softened, he realised his mistake, and he repented, seeking forgiveness and healing from God. The all-knowing and benevolent Lord, observing the good change in His servant, foresaw that things would happen so that he would soon enjoy what he was faithfully asking for.

There was a man in that place who, many years ago, was blind. After he went to the Wondrous Mountain, to Saint Symeon, and pleaded there with tears to God for his healing, he regained his sight. The elder had placed his fingers on the eyes of the unfortunate man, forming the sign of the cross, and immediately, the blind man saw before him the face of the saint shining brightly. Since then, the light has remained in his eyes, and his vision has been amazing.

His gratitude and unspeakable joy manifested in a vow. He promised to give all his income to the beggars every year in honour of his benefactor. One day,

therefore, the once blind man, fulfilling his vow, came to the pilgrimage and brought bread to distribute. He gave to several and arrived at the corner of the paralytic.

His sister stretched out her hand to take the bread, but the donor insisted that the sick man himself should receive the offering. Those present at the scene were displeased, and someone shouted, *"Don't you see that the man is completely paralysed? How can he move?"*

The enlightened blind man then, filled with divine passion, exclaimed, *"In the name of the servant of God, Symeon the Wonderworker, stretch out your hand and take from mine this blessing,"* and offered the bread.

The member of the paralytic, as if waking from a long lethargy at the sound of the voice, was loosened, filled with strength, and moved; he stretched out both hands and took the bread. He was healed before the astonished eyes of a crowd of pilgrims. The news of the miracle spread quickly, and from all mouths, the praising voice to the Lord was now heard: *"Christ, the God of Symeon, glory to You."*

At the same moment, the healed man saw before him the gentle figure of the holy elder, who, with boundless kindness, urged him to run to his house and throw away the idols he had hidden there. He wasted no time, went to his family home, and threw every memory of his old self into the fire.

A few months later, the young man decided to marry the daughter of a Greek pagan. However, before the wedding, he vowed to go and meet Symeon and thank God and the saint for the blessings he had enjoyed. But his father-in-law was in a hurry and pressured him to get married immediately, or he would give his daughter to someone else.

The friend succumbed, postponed fulfilling the vow, and got ready to be a groom. Thus, the guests gathered, and the crowning took place. Then everyone sat down to the wedding feast, eating and drinking carefree. However, the neglected vow should not leave the ingratitude unpunished. After all, sometimes God opens the path to people's true benefit, even through pain.

At the moment when the celebration peaked, a terrible demonic force enveloped the newlyweds and their families and threw them to the ground to writhe. Upon seeing the calamity, the attendees ran away in terror, abandoning both the festivities and the food and the newlyweds. Some calmer individuals began to try to calm them down.

Soon, things settled somewhat, and the culprits, who, of course, had realised their mistake, decided to perform the groom's vow all together. Thus, they started the next day, came to Symeon, and confessed, demonstrating their repentance in action. Meanwhile, the in-laws renounced their idolatrous delusion, asking for forgiveness for everything and for their ingratitude.

The saint gave them the necessary advice, supported them in the faith of Christ, baptised those who were now becoming Christians, blessed the newlyweds, and sent them back to their homes peacefully and happily. When their acquaintances saw them return happy and having made the decision for a new bright life, they glorified God and admired the grace granted to His servant Symeon.

Van Den Ven, Paul, *La Vie Ancienne de s. Syméon Stulite le Jeune* (521-592) (Subsidia Hagiographica, αριθ. 32), Bruxelles, 1962, τόμ. 1, σελ. 112,130. 166-169.

25. SAINT NIKON THE “REPENTANT”

Introduction

He was born around 930 in the region of Polemoniachus in Pontus. He scorned the comforts of his parental home and sought refuge in the monastery of Chrysi Petra, where he immediately became a monk. During the 12 years he spent there, he made significant spiritual progress. He lived as a hermit for the following 3 years, constantly travelling. At the same time, he preached repentance.

When the Byzantine general Nikephoros Phokas liberated Crete from the Arab conquerors, St. Nikon went there to awaken the faith of its inhabitants, which had declined and nearly disappeared due to the long-lasting bondage of Muslims. Afterwards, Nikon travelled throughout Greece and eventually settled in Sparta, where he preached and established a monastery. We celebrate his memory on November 26.

When St. Nikon was in the monastery of Chrysi Petra in the early days, he astounded the brothers with his behaviour.

He mourned incessantly. One day, the abbot took him aside and, with paternal affection, said to him:

- "My child, since I know your life well, I am surprised by your excessive mourning. None of your actions merit this sorrow. Tell me, why are you sad and mourning and shedding tears? On the contrary, you should be pleased and cheerful now that you have escaped from the world and been illuminated by the light of God's Truth."

Then the ascetic, full of humility but also simplicity and not wanting to hide the true cause of his mourning from the guide of his spiritual journey, said:

- "My precious father, two reasons cause my laments and tears. Although I am planted in this earthly body and clothed in the leather robe of my condemnation, however, I do not know how I have been deemed worthy, the unworthy one, to see with the eyes of my soul the unseen beauties and endless joys of the eternal goods that we hope to enjoy. Therefore, I, the wretched one, fear lest the bonds of life prevent me from reaching and

participating in those that I am worthy to see mentally."

"And every time I have the vision of the eternal goods, I turn and think of my fellow humans; all those reckless ones with stone hearts, whose entire concern is exhausted in the vain cares of this fleeting life, and all their efforts are directed toward the joys of this world; all those who choose the fleeting even though they could prefer the eternal, like little children who are pleased to play with pebbles, and recklessly squander the wealth that their heavenly father has granted them."

"Well, the abandonment of the greatest goods by those fools causes me so much sadness that I appropriate their misfortune and feel their deprivation as my own. Thus, I cannot restrain my lamentations and the incessant tears."

From what he heard, the elder understood that Nikon was graced, more than anyone, with the virtues of love, brotherly affection, and restless concern for others. Astonished and praising God, he left his spiritual child to continue his struggle.

Twelve years passed, and through self-control and spiritual exercises, Nikon had reached the threshold of human and angelic nature. At precisely that moment, he learned, through divine revelation, that his natural father was searching for him. The same information reached the abbot, who became distressed and worried that the father's appearance might hinder the hermit's further journey, who, like a swift eagle, was rising toward the kingdom of God.

However, his anxiety did not last long. A new vision revealed to him in detail what would happen to his happy child. That is, Nikon was a "chosen vessel" destined for apostolic ministry. He would go through cities and villages, preaching repentance and the forgiveness of sins to the people, and that his battle with the powers of evil would be victorious.

That through him, the name of the Lord would be greatly glorified, and many people would find the path to salvation. That in the end, the ascetic would win for himself the eternal glory of Paradise. On the other hand, Nikkon, as soon as he learned of his father's impending arrival, ran to the abbot, fell at his feet, and,

sighing deeply, earnestly begged him to let him leave and move away from the monastery because he understood that the meeting with his father would not benefit him at all.

The elder, this knowledgeable observer of the dangerous movements of the human heart, found himself in a terrible dilemma. However, he rose, setting aside his deep pain, and wiping his tears and often sighing, said:

- "I do not dismiss you, my child. Divine Providence alone, which aims at the salvation of men, has arranged things this way. It chose you and made you an apostle to preach repentance and salvation. My child, if it were up to me, I would keep you close, even binding you with heavy chains, for my old heart cannot bear your separation. However, God's will must be done and I will not stand in the way."

"Just do not refuse to hear my last pieces of advice. My child, you are about to struggle against this world's darkness and chaotic forces. It is not an easy struggle, but your weapon, the word of God, is potent. So begin, as the Lord instructed his disciples, without provisions, without

money, in your tattered robe. A little bread and a little water to deceive hunger and thirst, but above all, take much prudence with you; it will bring you close to God."

"Avoid unnecessary associations with the people of the world, stay away from the receptions of the wealthy and the great. Seek to find the unremarkable and the poor; they are the heirs of the kingdom. To them, you should address yourself and consider them your true brothers. In your preaching, wherever you may be, shout out: *'Repent, the hour of the kingdom of heaven is near. Strive for good works. Return seeking the Lord, to secure eternal goods.'* This should be your preaching, my child, and the word you will use most, *'repent,'* will remain a designation in your life and after death."

The next day, Nikon, a brave fighter of virtue, took the road barefoot, wearing a tattered robe. He carried only his staff, the cross-bearing staff that the Virgin Mary had given him as a pledge of his apostolic calling, and a precious little cup, a family heirloom, a talisman against illness. He had a few wild greens and tender shoots hastily boiled for food.

Thus, he proceeded through the furnace of summer and the winter storms, unyielding and resolute, indifferent to the pains of the body, which he found more preferable than pleasures since they lead to God, while the latter lead away. And he thunderously proclaimed "*repent*" with every step, according to the exhortation of his spiritual father.

He faced daily multitudes of temptations in the wilderness, some from the thieves lurking on the paths, and others from the cunning spirits that dwelled in the wooded valleys. However, he overcame every difficulty by shouting "*repent.*"

For three years, he roamed in desolate places, exercising his body with immeasurable asceticism and battling the evil one until he became a mere shadow. Yet his spirit reached heights of strength, bravery, and patience. He was now ready to leave the wilderness and travel to cities and villages to continue his good struggles, gaining new victories.

Before he set out, he fervently prayed to the Lord of hope, saying:

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- "Bless me, Lord, and enlighten me with the unending light of your face, and always be with me, the weak one, for the strong who fight against me are increasing, causing me greater sorrows and more dangerous woes. Have mercy on me, see my efforts, hear my sighs. Many of my enemies unjustly hate me, and I have only you as my protector and helper; I have placed my hope only in you, in you who instil courage in your fainthearted servants."

Thus prayed Nikon, pleading with God to give him strength and a fighting spirit against the wicked demons. And God listened to his supplication and assured him of the unceasing support He would give him. He heard the divine voice speaking within him: "Do not think that I have abandoned you; what you have suffered was to prove your virtue. If I allowed your enemies to torment you as they wished, it was to test you; furthermore, a victor is only crowned when he participates legitimately in the contest. I have always been close to you and have kept your soul intact and unpolluted."

"From now on, no power will be able to harm you, and you will carry my

omnipotence everywhere. And you will see my light that you seek. Your weary body will become strong again, and you will be impervious to attacks, defeating and scattering the enemy's plots."

Delighted by this joyful promise, the great apostle, with renewed physical strength and the wings of assured hope, immediately rushed to proclaim the message of Christ, guided by Divine Grace, bravely facing and subduing the evil spirits.

"Therefore, he traversed, evangelising" many areas and succeeded in bringing with repentance, to the port of salvation, crowds of people who until then had been wandering in disbelief. Later, a divine nod indicated that he should journey to the island of Crete, which Nicephorus Phocas had just freed.

When Nikon arrived, he realised how much harm the barbarian occupation had caused the place and its inhabitants. Many could not withstand the hardships and, to escape, turned to the vile beliefs of the Saracens so that when the apostle began to preach, shouting "*repent*," as he was accustomed, the mob furiously rose up

against him, demanding to kill him. They were provoked by hearing such words, as they were unaccustomed to good and biased towards falsehood.

Seeing that his preaching could not bring them to reason and understanding that he had to use other means to achieve his goal, Nikon left aside "*repent*" and, like a wise doctor, sought to find the most effective way to cure the evil.

Guided in his thoughts by the Apostle Paul and aided by the prophetic gift that had adorned him for some time, he singled out some of the more knowledgeable and serious inhabitants. He sought to engage them in conversation in a kind and friendly manner.

Little by little, change was coming. Their hardness softened, and they found that Nikon was right. The saint then followed Jesus' example when he spoke with the Samaritan woman. He began to admonish them lovingly for their waywardness, clarifying how great a mistake they made in abandoning their fathers' faith in the true God and embracing the delusion and barbaric customs of the conquerors.

Those who listened to him admired his paternal kindness, and over time, they, too, became more receptive to him, encouraging others not to oppose him but rather to pay attention to him because he could help them.

Thus, Nikon's virtue built love in the hardened hearts of these rude people, transforming their aversion to his words into interest and effort to apply them. Such was the saint; what he could not achieve with the preaching of repentance, he achieved with his virtue.

Like a seasoned fisherman who knows how to bring the catch closer, Nikon led his brothers, slain by sin, towards immortality, using not what human wisdom prescribes but what the Holy Spirit indicates.

Over time, the saint influenced more and more people, and soon, the Cretans regarded Nikon as a messenger of God to guide them in their return to the true faith. They paid attention to his words, and whatever he commanded was, for them, a divine law. His fame spread throughout the island, and everywhere he went, he was

welcomed, and everyone wanted to listen to him.

For the next five years, through hard work and the strength of God, the saint catechised, baptised, built churches everywhere, ensured that clergy were ordained, and by removing every obstacle, arranged matters so that the Church of Crete would regain its former glory. All the Cretans turned towards virtuous works, and everything took a good direction, so Nikon considered his mission completed.

Therefore, he set out from Gortyna to return to his homeland. After a three-day journey, he stopped to spend the night near the ruins of an old temple. After praying, he planted his staff with the cross in the ground and lay down to sleep. Before he could fall asleep, he had a strange vision.

Before the cross of his staff shone a light as if it were a lit candle. He understood immediately. He rose, knelt before the cross illuminated by the incorporeal divine light, and prayed until dawn, thanking the Lord for deeming him worthy to be illuminated by His marvellous light, thus fulfilling the promise He gave

him when He called him to the apostolic work.

At dawn, he slept for a short while and saw in his dream a modest woman ordering him to rebuild the destroyed temple, for, as she said, this was the will of the Lord. When Nikon asked her who she was, she replied that she was Photini, who had witnessed for Christ. While chiding his hesitation, she warned him that he would not manage to leave the island if he did not rebuild her temple.

When he woke up in the morning, the missionary forgot about the dream and prepared to set out on his journey. However, he immediately lost his sight. Frightened, he realized that he had defied divine will and decided to stay until the temple was built. Then, the Lord restored his eyesight.

Of course, he lacked all the means to begin the construction, but here, too, the miracle occurred: the following evening, the surrounding villagers saw a great fire rising up from the place of the demolished temple. Astonished, they grabbed shovels and picks and rushed to extinguish the fire. However, they found Nikon there waiting

for them and speaking to them about the need to build the temple.

They then got to work, and in the following days, each willingly offered whatever they could; under the supervision of the saint, the construction progressed and was completed. After the consecration and the installation of the priests, the temple functioned in exemplary order. Nikon left Crete and travelled back to his homeland.

Γαλανοπούλου, Μελετίου Ευαγγ., Αρχιμ., *Βίος, πολιτεία, εικονογραφία, θαύματα και ασματική ακολουθία του οσίου και θεοφόρου πατρός ημών Νίκωνος του «Μετανοείτε»*, εν Αθήναις 1933, σελ. 46 εξ., 68 εξ., 72 εξ.

Water From the Desert